

SOUTH AFRICA'S LEADING GAMING, COMPUTER & TECHNOLOGY MAGAZINE

NAG

PC PLAYSTATION XBOX

🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥

<Hardware>

SyncMaster XL2370

Razer Mamba

ROCCAT Apuri

Level 10 Gaming Tower

🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥

<Dead Space 2>

**We dig deep into the strategically
dismembered guts of Dead Space 2.**

🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥

<Reviews>

Nut up! All the big ones have landed!

Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 | Assassin's Creed II

Dragon Age: Origins | DJ Hero | Left 4 Dead 2 | + Tons more!

If it's missing, you're out of luck. You see, the NAG DVD is a lot like that sock you will never find after the washing is done. It's gone forever...



vol 12 issue 10 01.2010 SOUTH AFRICA R42.00



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very, very soon**

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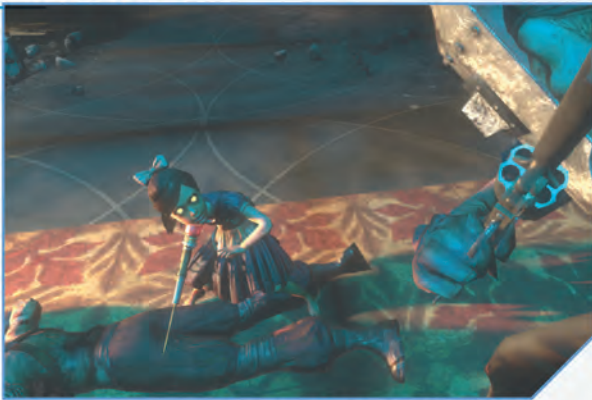
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Assassin's Creed II



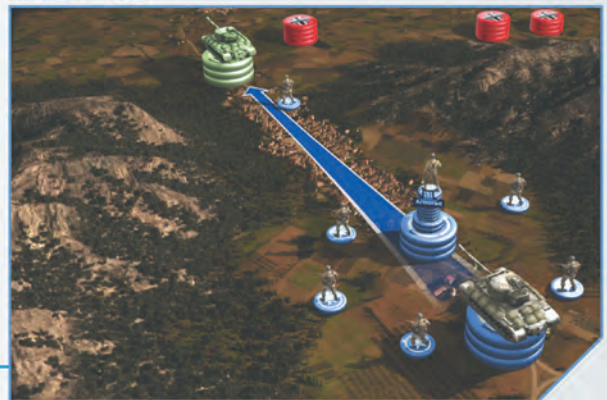
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WELCOME BACK EVERYONE... I say this every year and this year is going to be no different. I'm writing this on the night of 2 December 2009. It'll appear in the future for you to read – this usually only happens for the January issue thanks to the printer deadlines and various company closures for the festive season. I believe 2010 is going to be a year none of us will forget in a hurry, and for more reasons than I can list here...

Watch out for the referendum vote in the next issue: we have big plans for NAG but need to make sure we're on the right page and are thinking logically. The only way to be sure is to ask your opinion and then take action. Be sure to keep an eye out for it. It's very exciting stuff and will represent different levels of freedom for everyone reading the magazine, advertising in it and putting it together. Freedom is important and I sometimes feel "trapped" by circumstances that are out of my control... Sorry about all the mystery and drama, but certain people might be watching. Oops, I've said too much.



OH DEAR...

While putting this issue together, I received two different complaints about our review scores – one for a hardware item, and one for a game review. The rationale used is that if NAG rates a product poorly then nobody will buy it, so please don't run the review. Now, I understand that these kinds of requests / complaints / things come from people who are perfectionists by nature and very passionate about their products and brands. I understand because I'm very passionate about my brands (NAG, SACM and rAge). This puts me in a tricky spot. My moral high ground has always been that our readers come first, because without the readers, we (and the advertisers and publishers and distributors) all lose out. I'm sure you'll all agree that you don't want "paid-for" reviews and journalists who are too scared to say the wrong thing. Freedom of the press is important (well, at least around these parts it is). The other tactic used is then to threaten not to send us products for review if we won't give them a good rating. However, our readers are smart enough to know that if a product (or the brand) isn't in NAG, then they shouldn't bother with it. I'm just highlighting this (publically) because I want to avoid any further issues with explaining our policies to companies in the future... Now I can just point to this page in NAG. We can't bend over to pressure when it comes to product reviews, so please don't ask us. This creates an awkward silence because it isn't something we will ever compromise on. Also remember; at NAG, we always look for the silver lining in every product, and we also know that every product has a buyer out there somewhere.

Keep them peeled...

Michael James
Editor

House keeping

The ongoing story on the DVD had to die because we put the DVD to bed the same day the December issue went on sale. Thanks for the support – we'll look into something more constructive eventually. In other DVD news, the **Avatar Demo** on the DVD will report that **a file is missing. Just click ignore.** It's only a text (.txt) file you won't need or care about anyway. Then, the Rabbids... sigh! Some clown (okay, the Art Director) forgot to put them in the last issue. He's blaming the fact that he wasn't sleeping well and was sick (chicken pox at his age – right) and there was a deadline. We did spank him with paintballs the other day, so all is forgiven. We've added a new entry to the issue-planning document (pictured here)

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to avoid this ever happening again. I know how it must suck looking for something that isn't even there. So, in future, if the line on the issue-planning document (see image) isn't highlighted in green, then the badger must still be hidden in the magazine. Easy system... Really, sorry again...

rAge 2010

Make a note in your diary: the show will take place from 1 to 3 October 2010.

Here's a note to anyone who wants to exhibit in 2010... This year's show is going to sell out very quickly in terms of space on the show floor, as we're not allowing any more piggybacking and we're making some serious changes to how things work. So, book early.

Remember, it's the only technology show in the country that attracts over 20,000 people. Also, remember that those people are not scared to spend money on the hobby they love – they'll even go hungry or sell their grandmothers to the underground slave market. We also get millions worth of exposure in the media (we're the only show everyone wants to actually be at), and we spend a small fortune on marketing rAge ourselves. Finally, keep in mind that those 20,000+ people have between three and eight other people (according to some study somewhere) who ask them for advice on what to buy and where to buy it – the same applies to NAG magazine. Just a heads up...

One more thing...

You might have noticed a different format for NAG this month. :) This is part of our experimentation with different papers and looks and feels. The bottom line is that we can't really expand NAG in its current format – the printing is just too expensive to increase the page count and/or print run. Our overall goal is to deliver more gaming content, so let us know if you can live with this kind of paper and look and feel or not. Send your comments to ed@nag.co.za.

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SAVAGE, put down the knife and get back to work!

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Letter of the Moment

FROM: John

SUBJECT: Case number #1: Armed Theft

"H, THIS IS MISTER Chief Inspector Doctor Professor Analyst Communications Officer Cameron here; I am contacting you about the robbery that took place during the month of October, which was publically announced as 'the letter of the moment' in your November issue of NAG. I'm sorry to say that it is a crime to not report a crime, but if you agree to help us catch the criminal, we will not include any of your details in any statements and furthermore drop any past*, present, and future criminal charges against you or any other staff members at Tide Media. We would greatly appreciate your co-operation with the arrest of this man 'Dries, we can help to stop further acts of prize theft as well and gather necessary information to arrest the cops who are currently under his payroll for corruption. We ask of you to please send us a sample of 'the letter of the moment' prize for study of its delivery method, the similarity in its content and its 'street' value, and we can hopefully catch this guy through reverse engineering of the delivery system. We would simply ask for his details, but we understand you have a privacy policy. We would also like a description of his weapon, as all known 'cyber' dealers are registered with us, and we can narrow down his purchase to an area too. Thank you for your co-operation. Our details are listed below.

Sure, no problem inspector Cameron. We'll make sure the delivery guys bring you some money for lunch to help make all this just go away. Sorry it's not doughnuts, but they don't keep well in the Sun. Ed.

** I swear she said she was 18!*

megarom
interactive

The 'Letter of the Moment' prize is sponsored by Megarom. The winner receives two games for coming up with the most eclectic chicken scratch.

IMPORTANT STUFF! PAY ATTENTION!

Land Mail: P.O. Box 237, Olivedale, 2158
Cyber mail: letters@tidemedia.co.za
Important: Include your details when mailing us, otherwise how will you ever get your prize if you win...



FROM: Eric

SUBJECT: Gaming is serious business
"THIS LETTER IS ABOUT people who take gaming far more seriously than they should. I'm not talking about the competitive gamers. I'm talking about people who claim to be the best at guitar hero or think that they are better than you because they have a bigger gamer score. This is about the people who brag because they have played a game so much that they can finish it in three hours on the hardest difficulty. What I want to know is when did games stop being about fun and start being about who is the best?"

Probably when those two IT technicians sat down in front of Pong for the first time – you know what gamers are like. Ed

FROM: Shane

SUBJECT: Going back to old Games

"HELLO AWESOME PEOPLE AT NAG. Remember the days of playing the great graphics games of earlier years, like the first Medal of Honor, Tomb Raider or whatever did it for you. These games seemed to have fantastic visuals. But if we were to get the sudden urge [LOL, I'm sure you meant urge, Ed] to revisit one of these past loved games the situation is as follows: First a massive search is started to find the long lost title amongst the newer ones and when you finally find it you crack open the dust ridden box, only to find dust were the disk should be. And after searching all the places you didn't even know about in your house, your friend's house and even in your PC case in some instances, you eventually find the disk(s) [DVD was a good advancement]. The wait was long but the memories of this game make it worth it, the anticipation grows. You start installing it, the pictures look dated, but you weren't expecting Crysis. The install is painstaking (it's probably 2-4 CD's) during the install you have to get one of the disks polished because even the actual case couldn't protect it from the inevitable years. Finally the installer closes. You boot the game, hoping and praying that the newer OS doesn't reject your effort. You set the graphics to high, even on an outdated PC like mine this is normally possible, this is something most people could only dream of when the title was a new release. You click the teasing 'New Game' option and the loading bar pops up for a moment, and what used to take forever flies by.

The opening graphic, well opens. How you remember it. Then the first few moments of the game hit you. The graphics are more dated then you remember, but you continue because graphics aren't the only thing that make a good game. (It sure helps though). After the novelty of the game wares off you start noticing all of the flaws. The light and fluffy feeling control, pixilation, lack of physics and of course old glitches. The whole thing feels like a totally different game then the one that you remember. It just leaves a bad taste in your mouth and dampens the memories of the game. You feel like you should have just left it alone.

What's my point? Try not to always run back to old games, you might be sadly disappointed. This is part of the reason why I didn't get the backwards compatible PS3... less temptation."

Indeed. Someone helped me to get the entire collection of Commodore 64 games and an emulator a few years ago [thanks again Tobyl]... I was so excited and loaded up a few old favourites. They just seemed better in my memory, and from now on, that's where they're going to

stay. Although I did really enjoy the quick session of Paratroid I had and Uridium and Parallax... Hmm, I wonder where those files are again... Ed.

FROM: Michael

SUBJECT: My First NAG

"AS I SIT HERE and ponder what to write for NAG's Letter of the Moment, I realize I have just wasted 15 minutes of my Maths exam. And so as I attempt the first question, my mind reels back to my first ever NAG.

The Saturday afternoon sun beat down on the small bookshops window and as I pass the open door a sweet aroma reaches my nose. What was that? A brand new best-selling book! No. A great magazine filled to the brim with the latest gaming previews, reviews, news, hardware and topped with a massive 9GB DVD containing demos, videos and patches. No, it couldn't be that. It's impossible to create a magazine like that, unless... The Editor was a mad mind-numbing vampire thing that turned his lackeys into brainless zombies that followed his every command. But even though I know vampires and zombies only exist in Australia, I stepped into the bookshop and found a plastic-coated treasure. Its plastic crinkling greeted me as my sub-conscious desire to buy gaming magazines starting with a Z screamed, 'Buy it. Buy it!' And so with a brave heart I leapt into NAG and I've never looked back."

That is a little dramatic – even for me. But I can't argue with you. NAG is rock and roll. NAG is pure awesome – and that's on our off day. ;) Ed.

FROM: Thabani

SUBJECT: Games developed by New Age Gaming

"CONSIDERING THE FACT THAT you are the leading gaming magazine in the nation (citation: very first line of the magazine cover). You are among the few that promotes gaming in the country or rather continent. You have received awards for your achievements (applause). Your staff is composed of people who actually love and play games (I hope). You have played almost every game that is released to the market (green with envy), and you have sat down and interviewed those blokes behind those games, but enough flattering.

Maybe the thought has crossed your minds, but with all those above credentials how tough can it be for NAG to break into game development? I know I know the NAG staff is only skilled journalists not code-writing geniuses, but we have talent here in SA. And yes, some local game developers have come and gone. Maybe 'NAG Game Studios' will come and keep coming."

I'm all up for that. I just need the ten million dollars or so to really kick it all off. Ed.

FROM: Kent

SUBJECT: Rating system

"SINCE I GOT MY first NAG, in 2006, the first thing I have always done is to check if the magazine has a review of a game I want to get. I've made myself a rule you see... if the game scores between 80 and 85, I will get it. If it's between 85 and 90, I will get it next week. If it's 90+ I'll get it tomorrow. This is, if I have the money, of course. I rely heavily on your rating system to get a game... although sometimes, when I really want a game and you rate it less than 80, I'll still get it. :) Keep up the good work."

So, what you're really saying is that no matter what we say you'll still buy a game if you really want it. Good to know we could be of service, Ed.

FROM: Gareth

SUBJECT: Modern Warfare 2

"WOW. I GOT TO give to Activision and Infinity Ward. Modern Warfare 2 has got to have one of the most intense storylines ever. I'm sitting here watching all the endings (I know I shouldn't) and the 'No Russian' mission because I heard about it. At first when I heard about the 'No Russian' mission I got really excited and thought how much fun it would be. But when I actually watch it... I've got to say I was generally freaked out. It's not like in GTA. It just seems more intense, more real. Overall, a hectic but awesome looking game! What are your thoughts on these 'disturbing' scenes/levels?"

I think they're great. In fact, there isn't enough really "real" in gaming these days. The real problem is the mainstream media getting all excited over nothing. I also think that games are overrated (as in age rated). There's nothing in Modern Warfare 2 that warrants an 18 age restriction - 16 is more reasonable. I've seen far worse in movies that were rated 16. But nevertheless, it's good to explore this new form of entertainment from all angles, no matter the risks. Ed.

In the past, I've said that I reply to every letter I get. I still do, but I thought I'd share some excerpts from some of the more "challenging" letters I have to deal with every month. Also, I don't reply to snail mail - I just can't do the handwriting thing anymore... Ed

"You think you know anything about gaming? My 1 year old brother could kick your ass at Call of Duty 4. Get a life. Show me one letter that was..." - **Lucas**

"Hey, sorry to bother you, but what is your email address?" - **Kyle**

"Obviously there were no women in the desert so the man turned to his camel." - **Kyle** (same guy)

NAG Fan artwork

This is the best of what we inserted during the month. If you can insert, use or create a piece of gaming artwork, incorporating the NAG logo, you might also end up here for your three lines of fame.



Johan Olivier: "Some NAG Artwork for the holiday season... I hope this is the right address to send in some NAG Artwork for you guys. Anyway hope you like it. The Programs used was DAZ 3D and Photoscape. Keep up the Good work."

"If the same person reads all of my emails, I feel sorry for them." - **Gareth**

"I just want to know, must you computer qualify for you to compete. In other words must you have above 2 RAM 2GHZ 9800 GEFORCE to compete?" - **Kobus**

"If you choose to do this, know that the explosion of my computer crashing will probably wipe out all the cities in a 300km radius of Hartbeespoort Dam." - **Joshua**

"So screw all the fanboys, you try playing counter-strike on an X-Box 360 or PS3 and see how far you get." - **Louis**

"Is that good enough, or do I need to get all emotional about something already knows about?" - **Chris**

"I would like to know if you have a GAMING LAPTOP/GAMING RIG that needs a good home." - **Hawk**

"Finally, it gives me an outlet for anger, instead of punching some idiot who is annoying me, I ignore him, wait till I get home, sit down, turn on my 360 or PC, choose a game, and quietly take out my frustrations... usually with a rocket launcher." - **Dane**

"I wasn't sure who to e-mail but I'm interested in getting into game testing/quality assurance." - **Henry**

"When people send letters to you, do you guys inform them beforehand, or do they only find out that their letter has been published when they see it in the magazine?" - **Lucas**

"I can still ask you guys anything? I'm not a nuisance?" - **Gordon** **NAG**

On The Forums

QUESTION: Which do you prefer more: a short, linear, high-quality cinematic action experience, or a long, multi-path game with lots of content and replay value?

Graal: "Well, games are expensive, so the longer they last the better."

wisp: "I like them long and hard..."

Wight: "I prefer a game that keeps me occupied throughout the two weeks of exams..."

Brunch23: "My playing time is a bit limited, so I tend to stay away from extremely long games such as RPGs (traded my Fallout 3 away), and prefer shorter games (not too short though. Like Graal states, games are expensive)."

Sir PaniCore: "I prefer longer games, which is the reason I absolutely loved Fallout 3. If a game is short I usually feel slightly ripped off unless the game has awesome multiplayer such as Halo: ODS and MW2, since then it has some replay value... well as long as you have friends that is. :)"

Xastain: "Definitely the latter. I believe in shaping my own destiny when I play a game. I'll easily go back to some more Warcraft III, StarCraft or Oblivion IV... even Need 4 Speed Most Wanted. Where is the fun in doing it one time only? If it was like that, no one would ever get hooked on games, cigarettes and some other stuff that I probably shouldn't mention here... I'm not hooked on Oblivion... I'm not hooked... not hooked... HOOKED... hook, line and sinker!"

Azimuth: "Depends on the game, really. Something like MW2 only needs to go on for about 5 or 6 hours, or my brains might explode. But I prefer a bit more game out of RPGs, for example (I invested over 80 hours into Fallout 3). And when NAG sends me complete rubbish to review, I'd like it to all be over as quickly as possible - about 10 minutes or so."

Bonezmamm: "Hmm, I prefer them longer than Mirror's Edge but shorter than GTA titles. The perfect length :p"

pArkEr: "I feel that if a game can give me a compelling yet satisfying story with a good conclusion, along with great gameplay elements, then the game's length becomes negligible. That's why I'd rate Uncharted 2 as good as Fallout 3, even though the latter is ten times longer. A massive RPG like Oblivion would just feel pointless without a good story to drive you forward. So my answer would be a short, cinematic experience."

Awsomemic: "The games that I tend to enjoy the most are the ones that are fulfilling, never without a dull moment, always has something new and interesting showing up and has replay value."

Scy7he: "Why can't we just have a little of both? Long multi-path can be great if done right, otherwise I'd rather choose a short linear but really epically memorable experience."

Cpt.Monde: "I'm a mad RPG fan so yeah it has to be long but if the game is awesome and short it doesn't really matter (MW, Uncharted, Heavenly Sword, etc.)."

Sanguinus08: "Give me a nice long game which I can complete in my own time. Something like Mass Effect is just perfect. Free roaming, lots of side quests and kick-ass action."

Domanskip: "Really does depend on what the game is trying to do but generally I'll choose the longer, more involved game. Short and intense can be fun, but in most cases you remember the games that give you something to remember them by. That's not a third nuclear blast or a clichéd snow-mobile stunt."

cov1e_stalker: "I prefer the more open-ended games, but with epic action sequences [e.g., S.T.A.L.K.E.R.]

Have your say on the NAG forums: forums.tidemediaco.co.za/nag/

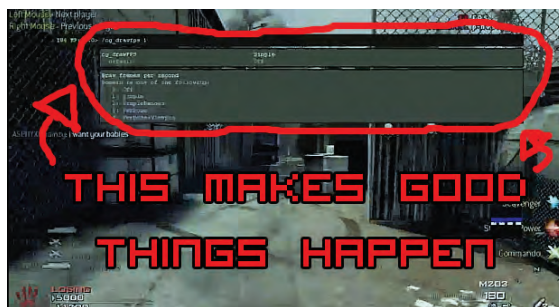
Modern Warfare mania!



Infinity Ward's epic new shooter is causing quite a stir

WHEN YOU PAGE THROUGH to our *Modern Warfare 2* review, you'll discover just how impressive the game is. But what does the rest of the world think? If money talks as much as people claim, the game is brilliant. Within 24 hours of its release, *MW2* sold over 1.23 million copies in the UK alone, smashing previous record-holder *GTA IV*'s score of 609,000. That figure represents close to one in 24 homes throughout the UK. Worldwide, the game managed to nab a five-day sell-through record of \$550 million, topping *GTA IV*'s record of \$500 million, and *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*'s \$394 million at the box office. According to the *LA Times*, Activision spent over \$200 million in distribution and marketing alone, but, clearly, the effort has paid off.

Not everyone is happy with the game, however, particularly the review boards in Russia. If you're not aware, *Modern Warfare 2* pins the Russians as the bad guys, and goes as far as putting the player directly in control of someone in the position to kill a whole lot of Russian civilians. Obviously, that just doesn't fly for some people, so the Russian powers had every copy of the game recalled until things could be set straight. At the very least, Infinity Ward will have to remove the controversial level if they plan on



selling the game in the territory. But for now, it's effectively been banned.

It's also had its fair share of attacks from the general public, mostly in the form of unhappiness over the lack of dedicated servers. But you get those who complain about issues, and you get those who solve said issues. The PC version might be void of modding tools, console commands and all the other stuff we're used to, but that hasn't stopped a number of hackers from breaking into the code and unlocking all sorts of interesting things. Their first goal was to establish a crude, dedicated server system, which was achieved within days of the game's release. Hackers were also able to access the console command system,

and, through that, discover a number of hidden multiplayer game modes. While they're not quite at the level of polish as the other modes, these new games are more-or-less functional. The modes are Thermonuclear War, in which players must fight over and detonate a central nuclear bomb, Protect the VIP, and a version of Capture the Flag with just a single, central flag.

These new game modes may well be planted in the code as a fore-runner to the upcoming DLC, which Activision claims will be available around Q2 of next year. With that, the publisher is hoping that they'll wangle another \$140 million from DLC alone, taking it one step closer to the elusive \$1 billion mark claimed by few of their titles, including *World of Warcraft* and the *Guitar Hero* series.

MW2 is a diamond

ELSPA recently awarded *Modern Warfare 2* (on Xbox 360) its highest praise, in the form of a diamond sales award. This award goes out to videogames that sell more than a million copies in the UK, and the Activision shooter was the 16th game to ever receive it. Other recipients include *Dr Kawashima's Brain Training*, *New Super Mario Bros.*, *Wii Play*, *Mario Kart Wii* and *Halo 3*, as well as *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* on Xbox 360.

Kane has updated his status



Kane: pwning n00bs! LOL

4 hours ago · Comment · Like

NAG: While many fans are looking forward to another jaunt with Kane and his gang of Noddies, there are a number of *C&C* veterans not too eager to watch their beloved franchise delve into the world of modern RTSes. Unfortunately for the latter, EA's Van Caneghem, who calls the shots when it comes to *Command & Conquer*, is very positive about the brand's shift away from the domain of the super hardcore strategy nerd.
2 hours ago

Van Caneghem: "Look what online has done for RPGs over the last 10 years. All the other categories are following suit... we're looking forward to building something to be a leader in that space. It allows you to do everything you would have expected from a boxed game, but it adds a lot more to it... being connected and connected with players, and persistence, the social elements of playing against each other with other friends."
1 hour ago

NAG: Then he coyly tops it off with this little cherry:
30 minutes ago

Van Caneghem: "What you're seeing with all the social gamers on Facebook... they are actually already playing strategy games whether they know it or not. Taking a franchise like *Command & Conquer* and expanding it to a wider audience is part of the strategy."
5 minutes ago

Write a comment...



ANNO 1404 TO EXPAND

Ubisoft's recently released *Anno 1404* is a fantastic title, but it lacks one important aspect: multiplayer. That's all about to be addressed in the upcoming expansion, but it won't just stop there. Entitled *Venice*, the expansion will see this already complex game taken up a notch, with two new ship types, a new island type (volcanic), 60 new items, 300 new quests, two new quest types and, of course, the rich Venetian culture to explore. Screenshots released at this stage imply canal-based city construction, but any details on that are limited at the moment. The new multiplayer mode will allow players to play against each other or cooperatively, and supports up to eight players. *Venice* will be available in February next year.

EA slices off a piece of Pandemic

With work on *Saboteur* finally finishing up, EA has decided that developer Pandemic isn't worth as much as they originally thought when they bought the studio in 2007. Pandemic, who is also responsible for *Full Spectrum Warrior* and *Star Wars: Battlefront*, will have to let all but a few of its 200 staff go. Those who don't get sacked will be incorporated into the inner workings of EA, as well as the publisher's Montreal studio – to form what EA is calling a "core team." Following that, the publisher is still convinced that Pandemic has some life left in them, and has announced the next in line of the Mercenaries Inc. brand. We're not quite sure how any of that is going to work, or even if the Pandemic logo is going to make its way onto the box, but we'll keep you posted on the details as they emerge.

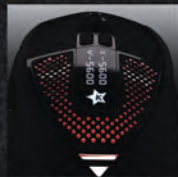
This move forms part of EA's recent cost-cutting strategy, in which they set out to reduce the company's total headcount by a massive 1,500 worldwide. While this is certainly bad news for the studio as a whole, these things can often result in stronger, more focused studios being put together by former employees.



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Microsoft raises the ban hammer

IT SHOULD BE COMMON knowledge by now that Microsoft doesn't take kindly to people who like to pirate games on the Xbox 360. Typically, the punishment for those found using a modded console and/or playing pirated games is a ban from Xbox LIVE, which means banned gamers lose all abilities to play games online with their pirate friends. Except, now, being banned from Xbox LIVE means users lose access to all the fancy new things that Microsoft has added to the XBL service, including Netflix, Sky Entertainment, social networking services like Twitter, Facebook and Last.FM.

As part of the run-up to the December madness, Microsoft has decided to trim the fat off their bulging servers by banning a huge number of people.

How big, exactly, is unknown to anyone but Microsoft, but rumours (which the company has denied) abound that the figure is as much as one million. Regardless of the exact figure, it's still a lot of people, and now many of those people, unable to check out their friends' statuses without getting up to find the PC, are attempting to team up for a class-action legal suit against Microsoft.

It's a laughable move, and Microsoft is suitable unconcerned. "Piracy is illegal and modifying an Xbox 360 is a violation of the Xbox LIVE Terms of Use," a spokesperson said. "Microsoft is well within its legal rights to ban these users from Xbox LIVE." To which the Xbox LIVE general manager, Marc Whitten, added: "It's a cat and mouse game. These were people that were pirating software."

Microsoft in court

Xbox 360 memory cards are expensive. Because of this, companies like Datel do a lot of business supplying generic memory cards for consoles like the Xbox 360 and PSP, where they can undercut Microsoft by as much as 80% in terms of value for money. Microsoft doesn't like this; to combat this problem, the company recently announced that an upcoming update for the console would render all generic memory devices unusable. That means saved games, DLC, updates and anything else would be inaccessible.

Their reasoning is not related to revenue, but rather cheating. Datel's devices are commonly used to circumvent anti-cheating mechanisms on the Xbox 360, which is a big problem for a lot of people. But Datel isn't taking this lying down, and is now taking Microsoft to court over a little matter called anti-trust law.

"Microsoft's purpose in disabling Datel's memory cards is to prevent consumers from choosing a Datel product that offers far better value for the price," reads the Datel complaint. "There is no benefit to consumers from Microsoft's decision to target and disable Datel's memory cards. To the contrary, Microsoft's actions will leave approximately 50,000 consumers with useless memory cards and (without the ability to access their data on the cards), forestall innovation, and deprive future consumers of the benefits of competition."



AGE OF RECESSION

Despite a number of attempts to boost revenue through various loyalty and newcomer programmes, *Age of Conan* publisher Funcom has reported a loss of \$9.6 million for 2009. Revenue is down a whopping 69% from 2008, when the company managed to turn a profit to the tune of \$3.3 million. Not the type to give up hope, Funcom assured its shareholders that they still have \$34.8 million in the bank, and have made efforts to cut spending by \$400,000 per month, even though they have recently opened a new studio in Montreal. *AoC* is heading over to South Korea next year, where the publishers are hopeful it will be able to find its place among the huge variety of MMORPGs in the country. In related news, Funcom reports that work is progressing well on its next title, *The Secret World*.

A FEW MORE HEROES

Wii game *No More Heroes* is on its way to the Xbox 360 and PS3, although the details are still up in the air. The ported versions, entitled *No More Heroes: Heroes Paradise*, which will feature higher resolution textures, improved lighting and obviously a remodelled control system, have a publisher secured in homeland Japan, but are struggling to find support outside of the territory. Ubisoft, which previously handled the Wii version's release in North America, isn't interested in publishing the game.



Left 4 Online?

You're probably aware that NAG has a not-so-secret love of anything to do with zombies. And, as is the case with most good zombie fanatics, we're amused by the idea of putting zombies into absolutely every genre on the planet. Despite some form of zombie presence in almost all MMOs, there's not yet been a title bold enough to dedicate itself to the walking dead, until now. ArenaNet co-founder Jeff Strain is out to change all of that with the formation of Undead Labs – the first (and presently, only) studio committed to the development of a MMOZ (no prizes for guessing what the Z stands for).

"Every time I see a good zombie movie with friends, we spend days debating our strategies for surviving the zombie apocalypse," said Strain. "The police station, or the supermarket? Garden rake, or staple gun? Bach, or the White Stripes? I'm a game developer, so I'd probably be useless for anything other than ghoulish bait, but I'm excited to have the opportunity to build an MMOZ that lets us put those strategies to the test and find out for sure."

Fuel up the chainsaws, sharpen the shovels and break out the lawnmower, it's only a matter of time until you do nothing else but slay zombies in a persistent online world.

Another one down (under)

We often have a good giggle at all those people who scampered off to Australia when they couldn't take the heat. Why? Because their game classification system is so archaic that it doesn't have a rating higher than 15... meaning that any game with mildly adult content gets "refused classification" (read as "banned") outright.

The latest title to fall prey to this outmoded system (which authorities in that country seem unwilling to change) is *CrimeCraft*, a gang-based MMO game. Okay, the fact that the game positively rewards players for having their characters make use of drugs is probably not the best message to send to kiddies, but still...

These chemical "boosts" have caused all the ruckus.

"Boost parallels the names, chemical elements, administration, treatment and addictive elements of real-world proscribed drugs, and when used, provide quantifiable benefits to a player's character. The game therefore contains drug use related to incentives or rewards and should be refused classification," said the Australian Classification Board's report.

"In addition, the names of boosts mimic the chemicals and colloquial names of proscribed drugs. Examples include K-Dust, Birth, Chimera, Majoun, Betadyne ResistX and Zymek Stim-Ex, as well as the anabolics Raze and Frenzy."

Bigger name games that have fallen victim to the Mother Grundies include *Left 4 Dead 2* (hacked to pieces to get classification) and *Fallout 3* (lost in a wilderness of red tape). *Modern Warfare 2* dodged the bullet, getting a 15+ classification, but this decision is being appealed... maybe that one will get banned, too.

Gameloft cuts back on Android development

While many are touting the benefits of development on Google's portable Android operating system, mobile gaming giant Gameloft isn't quite sold on the idea yet. The developer claims that the platform is "not as neatly done" as rival App Store, despite it being largely recognised as more accessible for small developers, due to comparatively relaxed development policies and restrictions. Gameloft is hardly a small developer, however, and is more interested in the bottom line and user base than anything else – in this case, they claim that their products sell 400 times more on iPhone than on Android. According to them, "Google has not been very good to entice customers to actually buy products. On Android nobody is making significant revenue." As a result, the company has instated massive cutbacks in development for the platform.

They said it...

"I often say to Mr Iwata: 'If I was applying for a job here today, **I, with my actual college degree, would probably not have been employed by Nintendo.**'"

Shigeru Miyamoto, creator of *Mario*

"In ten years' time, a lot of what we call 'console games' won't exist."

Yoichi Wada, CEO of Square Enix

"We really think games can be ... a true form of cultural expression, like movies or books. So I think we, as a developer, feel that what we did is successful if people, even just slightly, change their mind about video games and think, 'Yeah. **Actually, a game can be as meaningful as a movie.**'"

Guillaume de Fondaumiere, co-CEO of Quantic Dream

"We were really excited coming off of *Left 4 Dead 1*, and just had a ton of ideas. **At the end of the day we just had so much content, that we decided that a sequel was the best way to go.**"

Kim Swift, designer at Valve



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World of whinecraft

MOST HONEST, HARD-WORKING INDIVIDUALS know that games require some form of interaction to perform their duties as entertainment. Certain lazy people might go as far as to call this interaction an "effort," but this is a new level of lethargy. *World of Warcraft* is often a target of courtroom drama, and now, seasoned player Erik Estavillo is jumping on the bandwagon. His concerns are the developer's "sneaky and deceitful practices" to get players spending more cash and bloating the already overflowing Activision | Blizzard coffers. One of those practices, and I wish we were kidding, is requiring players to walk between locations. Estavillo feels that it takes too long to get to different locations, and that players are encouraged to fork out extra cash for the expansions that extend travel options,

or, Heaven forbid, just spend some time getting around in the game.

Now, we'll readily agree that the world of *World of Warcraft* is a big place, and getting around does take a bit of time, but the fact that mounts are now available to characters at level 20 means travel is now even less of a problem than he's making it out to be. If that wasn't enough, Estavillo is also concerned that his vast collection of health issues (including OCD, agoraphobia, depression and Crohn's Disease) could lead to his untimely and self-inflicted demise when combined with *WoW*'s apparent suicide-inducing nature. He's serious about this, and serious people subpoena serious witnesses, in the form of Winona Ryder and Depeche Mode's Martin Lee Gore. Suddenly, this all seems like a massive ploy to score a couple of autographs.

iBraaaaaains

Modern Warfare 2 is out, and the whole world has already forgotten about *Nazi Zombies*... except for iPhone users. This pocket-size version of the Nazi Zombie map Nacht der Untoten (the original map released with *COD 5*), entitled *Call of Duty: World at War: Zombies*, is now available on the App Store for just \$10 (approximately R70). The game can be controlled either with tilting and tapping, or through an on-screen keyboard, and includes support for achievements, leaderboards, DLC and four-player multiplayer through Bluetooth or Wi-Fi.



MORE STUFF FOR TEKKEN 6

Fighting games are perfectly suited for tons of DLC, but Namco Bandai, developers of *Tekken 6*, don't want to stick to the normal stuff, and they don't want to charge for it, either. That's according to Katsuhiro Harada, producer of all things *Tekken 6*, who's happy to chat about DLC and its future with the game.

"There is a strong possibility we will. However, even if we were to do so, it would be free to the end user."

This is in addition to the content they're currently working on, which will enable online cooperative scenario play and various network patches. How they'll get around Microsoft's lack of support for free DLC remains to be seen, but it's certainly a good indication that a company this large is willing to put in the effort and not charge any more for it.



Pew pew!

Wii peripherals are a dime a dozen. Every second manufacturer is out to nab your hard-earned cash with their own flimsy tennis racquet or golf club attachment, but surprisingly few peripherals exist that don't actually need a controller to be stuffed into it. Introducing the Penguin United Crossfire Pistol, which is a standalone Wii controller shaped into a gun. Reports are coming in that it's a solid-feeling controller that works brilliantly with any shooting game for the platform, although it can also be used on any non-shooting title, since its insides are that of a regular controller. Destructoid's reviewer even goes as far as saying "this is easily the best gun peripheral I've ever used on the Wii." No local distributor is available at present, but you can order it directly from www.penguinited.com for the price of \$64 (approximately R470) including delivery.

Remoteless

Marc Whitten, the general manager of Xbox LIVE, is making some pretty sci-fi style predictions for the highly anticipated Project Natal input device. He is going so far as to imply that the new control system could replace the TV remote – allowing us, in truth, to become even lazier.

The increase in media services available through Xbox LIVE, including Netflix in the USA and Sky Player in the UK, are what prompted his statements.

"With the flick of my wrist I can change a channel," Whitten said. "With the power of my voice I can start a movie. I don't believe we are currently in the golden age of the television or the golden age of the game console or the golden age of the Internet; frankly, five years from now I don't know that you'll be able to tell the difference between those worlds."

Whitten also stated his belief that Project Natal would be able to manage TV content according to who is in the room at the time. "The context is not 1 billion channels, but one," he said. "One channel, with what I want, when I want it."

Now all we need are LIVE servers and online TV services in South Africa.



Evolution of RHYTHM GAMES



Dance Aerobics (1987)



Beatmania (1997)



GuitarFreaks (1998)



Guitar Hero (2005)



Rock Band (2007)



DJ Hero (2009)



It's over 1,000!

MTV Games' popular *Rock Band* series can now boast over one thousand songs between on-disc and DLC. The publishers originally claimed that the target would be met by December 2009, but they beat that by a whole month. Not the type to rest on their laurels, MTV and developer Harmonix have been hard at work developing the Rock Band Network – a system that will allow bands to upload their own music to the Network for the public to buy and download, once it's been reviewed by peers and officials. The system is currently ending its beta phase, and should be live before the end of Q1 2010. Any member of the Network, they bands, fans or otherwise, will be able to preview any song before it hits the store.



Another award for Sack Boy

Media Molecule certainly made a name for themselves with *LittleBigPlanet*. The user-generated content-driven game isn't showing many signs of slowing down, and is still snapping up awards.

Recently, the game beat *Boom Blox Bash Party*, *de Blob* and *Viva Piñata: Pocket Paradise* to get the BAFTA 2009 Children's Awards' Best Videogame accolade.

Studio boss Mark Healy said: "It means a lot. It was always an early ambition to make something that appeals to adults and kids, specifically that adults and kids could play together and have fun, and I suppose winning this some way confirms that maybe we did that."

"We've won so many awards for it, it's like, 'how do we ever top this?' I don't think I'll appreciate how really cool it is until I'm old!"



CENTURION 5 II THE LEGEND IS BACK

The all new Centurion 5 II has been vastly improved from the inside. This mid-tower chassis is designed with increased drive bay capacity, more airflow thanks to the enhanced ventilation and fan options and easy-to-install features. This is a multi-purpose chassis that you cannot go wrong with.



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A new Demigod rises

The long-awaited update to *Demigod* is finally upon us. There have been a number of patches since the game's release, but the latest one adds in a new Demigod – the Demon Assassin. The patch, version 1.2, also includes improved mod support and a number of balance tweaks and fixes for minor irritations. The patch also adds support for future additional Demigods, including the Oculus (which we can assume will be a general), which should also be available by time you read this.



Burn after reading

If you remember the joy of climbing into an After Burner arcade game cabinet, but, like most South Africans, missed out on the sequel, After Burner Climax, this might pique your interest. The game has been spotted on the Websites of two ratings boards, one Australian and the other Korean, which likely means a port of this arcade title is on its way to console. Speculation abounds that the title will be available on PSN, and most likely XBLA as well, but no date is certain yet.



Final Fight finally fighting fit

Retro gaming is huge these days, and companies like Capcom are fast realising the revenue potential of re-releasing old titles to the public. Joining in the trend are Final Fight and Magic Sword, two games that will be ported to XBLA and PSN with very few modifications. You'll be able to play them in either regular video mode or one that upscales the visuals to HD resolution, but don't expect a perfect transition to your 52" LCD – Capcom has decided to take the purist road with these titles. Both games will be sold next year as a bundle entitled Final Fight: Double Impact, and will have support for online leaderboards and co-op play.

And stay out!

IF YOU'VE BEEN PLAYING NCSOFT's latest MMORPG, Aion, you've probably encountered more than your fair share of botting (setting automated tools to grind and farm areas of the game) and gold sellers. It's a growing problem in MMOs these days, one that NCSOFT has finally got around to remedying by banning over 16,000 user accounts from their Western servers alone.

"We are taking a very hard stance on this issue and do have sophisticated processes and procedures in place that help us keep unwarranted banning to a

minimum," said community manager Andrew Beegle. There is always the risk of accidentally banning users who simply use a few macros, however, an issue that NCSOFT is acutely aware of.

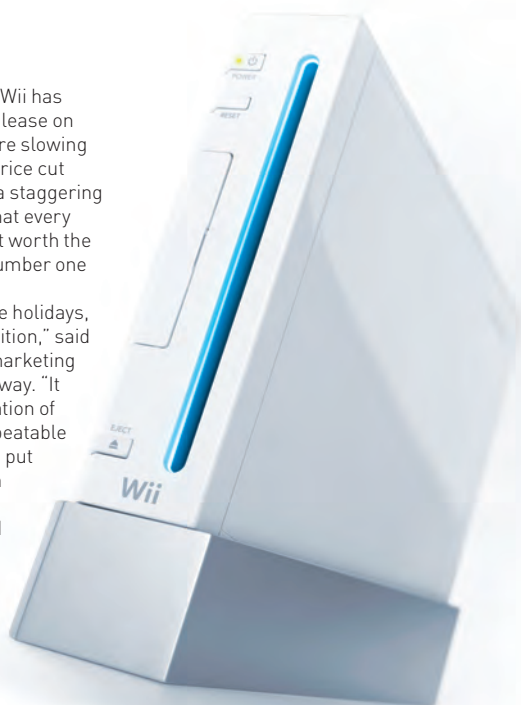
"Any action that modifies the client or automates the same way a bot does could potentially flag an account as a violator," he clarified. "Please understand that it is not what 'you' have done on your account, but what the account has done. If your account is shared, purchased, borrowed, or power-levelled, it could be the actions of anyone who's ever used the account."

Wii sales up

The recent price cut on the Wii has seen the console get a new lease on shelf life. Not that sales were slowing down that much. Still, the price cut saw weekly sales climb by a staggering 85%, making the console that every hardcore gamer thinks isn't worth the time of day remain at the number one sales spot.

"I think that going into the holidays, the Wii is in a very good position," said executive VP of sales and marketing at Nintendo, Cammie Dunaway. "It has an unbeatable combination of games, experience and unbeatable value, and that continues to put it to the top of people's wish list."

While sales had declined around 43%, the price cut saw unit sales rise (week on week) from 93,000 to 127,000. Hardcore.



WII: CHICKS DIG IT

Reggie Fils-Aime, the big wig over at Nintendo of America, is smiling once again. It seems that the Wii is something of a chick-magnet.

According to statements he made at a recent big business type event, the Xbox 360 holds only 11 percent of the female gaming market, while the PS3 scratches the surface with a paltry 9 percent.

That leaves 80 percent of the much sought after female gaming market (on console, of course) as Nintendo's playground.

"This didn't happen by accident," Fils-Aime said. "It's the result of a deliberate attempt to expand the market."

While these figures are fairly accurate (based on the sort of research Nintendo can afford to do) we still wouldn't advise "Hey baby, wanna play with my Wii?" as an effective pick-up line.

Gaming Charts

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PLAYSTATION 3

- 1 Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2
- 2 FIFA 10
- 3 Assassin's Creed II
- 4 Uncharted 2: Among Thieves
- 5 Darksiders

PLAYSTATION 3

- 1 FIFA 10
- 2 Need for Speed: Shift
- 3 Uncharted 2: Among Thieves
- 4 MotorStorm
- 5 Grand Theft Auto IV

XBOX 360

- 1 FIFA 10
- 2 Forza Motorsport 3
- 3 Left 4 Dead 2
- 4 Army of Two: The 40th Day
- 5 BioShock 2

XBOX 360

- 1 FIFA 10
- 2 Need for Speed: Shift
- 3 Forza Motorsport 3
- 4 Halo 3: ODST
- 5 Grand Theft Auto IV

PLAYSTATION 2

- 1 Bakugan Battle Brawlers
- 2 FIFA 10
- 3 WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2010
- 4 Silent Hill: Shattered Memories
- 5 Ben 10: Alien Force – Vilgax Attacks

PLAYSTATION 2

- 1 FIFA 10
- 2 Bakugan Battle Brawlers
- 3 WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2009
- 4 Ben 10: Alien Force
- 5 FIFA 08

PC

- 1 Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2
- 2 The Sims 3: World Adventures
- 3 Need for Speed: Shift
- 4 Mass Effect 2
- 5 Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Conviction

PC

- 1 Need for Speed: Underground 2
- 2 Need for Speed: Shift
- 3 The Sims 3
- 4 FIFA 10
- 5 CSI: 3 Dimensions of Murder

PSP

- 1 LittleBigPlanet
- 2 Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars
- 3 Gran Turismo
- 4 Jak and Daxter: The Lost Frontier
- 5 Ben 10: Alien Force – Vilgax Attacks

PSP

- 1 FIFA 10
- 2 Need for Speed: Shift
- 3 Grand Theft Auto: Vice City
- 4 Gran Turismo Roadster
- 5 Up

WII

- 1 Wii Sports Resort
- 2 Wii Fit Plus
- 3 New Super Mario Bros. Wii
- 4 Need for Speed: Nitro
- 5 Rabbids Go Home

WII

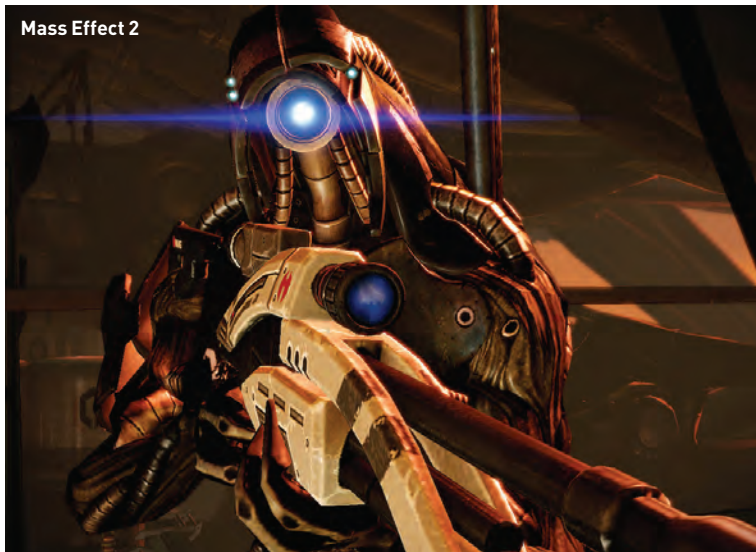
- 1 Wii Sports
- 2 Wii Sports Resort + Wii MotionPlus
- 3 Wii Fit + Wii Balance Board
- 4 FIFA 10
- 5 Wii Play

DS

- 1 Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Winter Games
- 2 Mario & Luigi: Bowser's Inside Story
- 3 Disney Fairies: Tinker Bell and the Lost Treasure
- 4 Mad Karts of Madagascar
- 5 Pokémon Platinum

DS

- 1 New Super Mario Bros.
- 2 Brain Training
- 3 MySims Agents
- 4 Bakugan Battle Brawlers
- 5 Up



Mass Effect 2

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Rabble rabble rabble

IT'S NOT UNCOMMON FOR the Church to lash out at particularly violent games, or those that deal with the undead, trips to Hell and murder "simulations." More often than not, publishers will shrug and move on, but Capcom isn't happy about the latest religious attacks on *Resident Evil: The Darkside Chronicles*, which complainants have claimed glamorises violence and promotes the occult.

"If we dabble in this area we open ourselves to influences and put ourselves at risk," writes Rev. John Goddard. "I would regard any encouragement for children to be drawn into this behaviour with extreme horror."

According to Leo Tan, Capcom's UK PR manager, this isn't the case at all. "Most games (and movies) like *Resident Evil* show characters fighting evil, not supporting it. Unfortunately, the clergy is showing a lack of understanding of the video games industry and is too quick to splash the holy water and lump video games players into stereotypical boxes.

"Video games are entertainment and like horror movies or other scary films they are covered by a ratings system. *Resident Evil* for example is a 15 and not suitable for anyone under that age. Parents have to be trusted to adhere to these age restrictions and use common sense."

Avatar multiplayer details revealed

Film-to-game conversions are, for the most part, pretty straight-forward affairs. From what we've seen, the upcoming game of the film, *James Cameron's Avatar*, has already made massive leaps away from the film's storyline, but the latest announcements regarding multiplayer show that the game is making an active effort to stand on its own. Up to 16 players can compete in five game modes strewn across ten different maps. Players can choose to play as either the RDA Troopers or Na'vi warriors, each with their own unique gear, weaponry and



skills. There will be a total of 48 weapon varieties, matched to an impressive 15 classes of armour. The five game modes are Team Deathmatch, Capture the Flag, Capture and Hold, King of the Hill and Final Battle, which will see teams attempt to destroy the enemy's key tactical points before the same is done to them.

OVER HERE! FREE GAMES!

If you yearn for the days when gaming was simple, graphics were ugly and control schemes with a single button were considered high-tech, Atari is looking out for you. As a part of the first stage of its recent Website redesign, Atari has incorporated the Atari Arcade, which includes Flash-based remakes of a few of its classic games. *Asteroids*, *Battlezone*, *Lunar Lander*, *Crystal Castles*, *Yars' Revenge* and *Adventure* await your grubby paws, and every game is free. If you think you've got what it takes to put up with these games of yore, head over to www.atari.com/arcade.

THE BAGINATOR?

The poor badger has once again been hijacked for a
☒ shameless
☐ honourable
☐ commendable
 promotion. In this current commercial
☒ marketing
☐ boredom relief
 exercise you can win a decent prize. Last issue it was Samsung and now it's Ubisoft and their annoyingly cute Rabbids.

The story goes that the Rabbids found the badger but then got lost in the magazine (hey, this is January, give us a break already). So now, you need to find all three of them... They look like this:

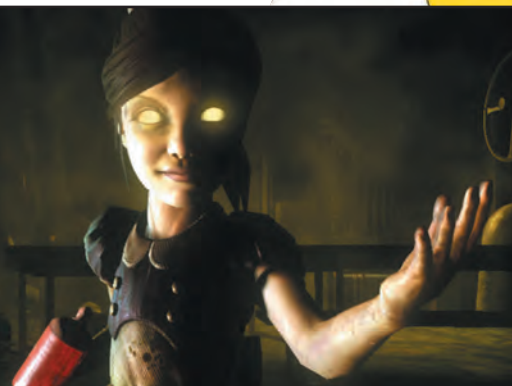
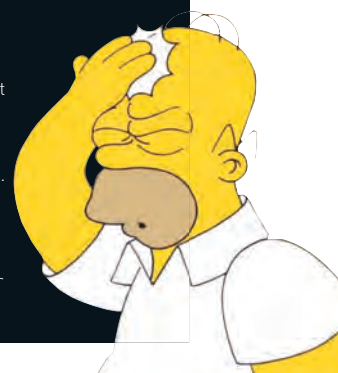


If you find them all send mail to ed@nag.co.za with the three locations. You can win the following cool stuff from Ubisoft and Megarom.



LAST MONTH'S WINNER

What can we say. The art department (Chris B) forgot to hide the badger Rabbids in last month's magazine... More details in the Ed's Note. They're definitely in the issue you're reading - we swear on our Xboxes.



Caption of the Month

Every month we'll choose a screenshot from any random game and write a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better caption. The winner will get a copy of *Wipeout HD Fury* for PS3, sponsored by Ster-Kinekor Entertainment. Send your captions to ed@nag.co.za with the subject line [January Caption].

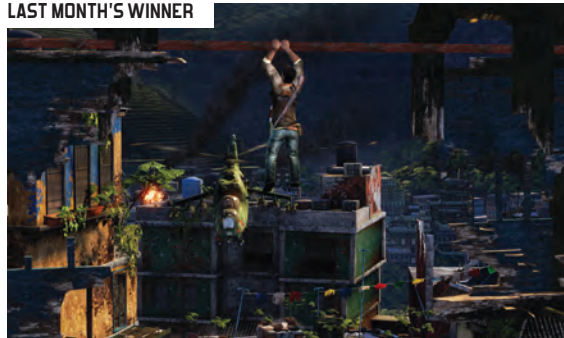


THIS MONTH'S CONTEST



NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT AT HUMOUR:
RedTide decides to spontaneously bust a move...

LAST MONTH'S WINNER



"This is your pilot speaking. We are now entering an enclosed neighborhood. If you look to your left you'll see the friendly security guard lifting the boom gate..." – Wahl Lessing

PREVIOUS MONTH'S WINNER



"Early testing of the 'Thermite SMG' didn't go according to plan." – Darren Greybe

Events

MAGIC THE GATHERING

WORLD WAKE PRE-RELEASE

When: 30 Jan
Time: 11:00
Type: Sealed
novvagaming.co.za

NOVVA'S FRIDAY NIGHT MAGIC

When: Every Friday (except 1 Jan)
Time: 19:00
Type: Standard, Constructed
Cost: R30
novvagaming.co.za

2-HEADED GIANT, EXTENDED/VINTAGE

On request
novvagaming.co.za

LANS

LANGAMES 2010 LANPARTY

When: 15 Jan
Where: Johannesburg
Type: Online Competition
langames.co.za

MAYHEM JANUARY 2010

When: 23 Jan
Where: Boksburg
Type: OpenLAN
langames.co.za

MAYHEM FEBRUARY 2010

When: 27 Feb
Where: Boksburg
Type: OpenLAN
langames.co.za

NOVVA LAN

When: 9 Jan
Time: 10:00-22:00
Where: Novva Gaming, JHB
novvagaming.co.za

YU-GI-OH!

TOURNAMENTS

When: Saturdays
Time: 10:00
Where: Novva Gaming, JHB
novvagaming.co.za

bl GAMES™ Release List

Release dates subject to change

WEEK 2: JANUARY

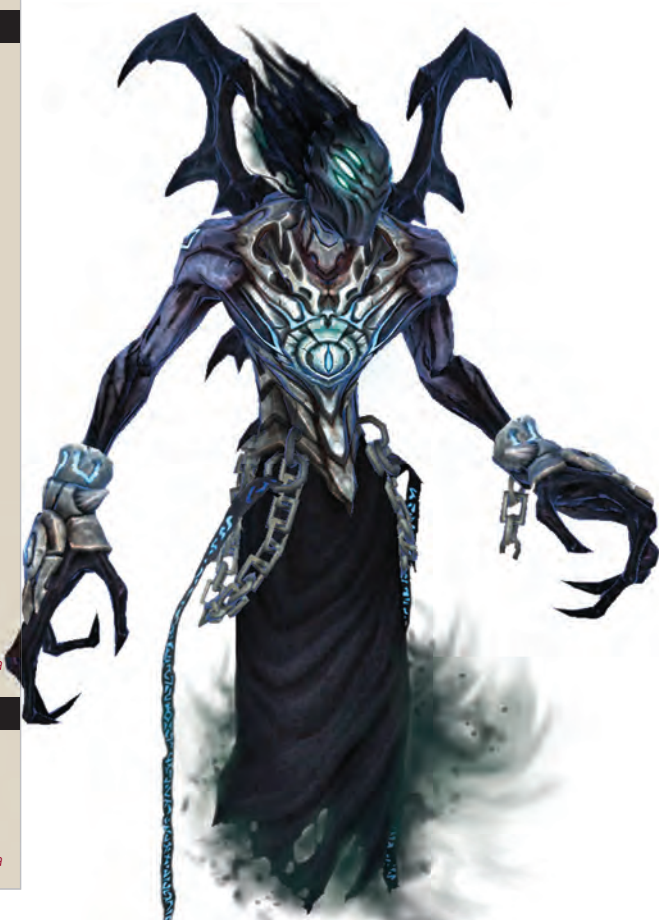
TITLE	PLATFORMS
Army of Two: The 40 th Day	PSP, PS3, Xbox 360

WEEK 3: JANUARY

TITLE	PLATFORMS
Dark Void	PS3, Xbox 360, PC
Darksiders	PS3, Xbox 360
Let's Party + Dance Mat	Wii
Bayonetta	Xbox 360, PS3

WEEK 4: JANUARY

TITLE	PLATFORMS
Vancouver 2010	Xbox 360, PC, PS3
Mass Effect 2 Collector's Edition	Xbox 360, PC
Mass Effect 2	Xbox 360, PC



PRE-ORDER BIOSHOCK 2 NOW TO GET YOUR 'LITTLE SISTER' COLLECTORS FIGURINE





BY MIKTAR DRACON

Super Extreme Explosion Shooter Game Headshot

HERE'S A THOUGHT. I tend to like videogames, more than first-person shooters. Gasp! Heresy! I must think first-person shooters aren't videogames! Well, in some ways I do. I think "different" that way. It's not my fault: my mother did the thinking while I was in the womb.

Don't misunderstand me: I like first-person shooters. Adored *BioShock*, loved *Half-Life*, enjoyed *Quake*, consumed *Prey*, survived *Ken's Labyrinth*, cleared *Wolfenstein 3D*, death matched *Doom*, escaped *Isle of the Dead*, navigated *Corridor 7*, uninstalled *Cyberwar*, finished *Dark Forces*, missed *Heretic*, felled *Witchaven*, dug *Duke Nukem 3D*, heralded *Hexen*... oh, I could go on for hours.

There is no question whatsoever about the legacy, tenure and prestige of the first-person shoot-them-up, and its varied history – as long as you avoid any about World War II. They're not **that** varied. What has come into focus lately, though, is what I dub the "set piece" subgenre of first-person shooters. *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* and its recent sequel are, perhaps, the best examples of this subgenre, because they both do it the best. *Modern Warfare 2*, you might say, is an increasingly scripted and very long cut-scene where you just move your cursor around to shoot things so the explosions don't stop coming all over your face. Oh, there is bang for your buck there, your money's worth of high, dynamic-range money shots. It's a veritable potpourri of shader-fuelled eye-candy ejaculate that runs down a loose woman's breasts until finally you can't hold it in anymore and you... finish... the game in one sitting. Best seven hours of your life? Totally. If it didn't have multiplayer to supplement its rapid climax, would opinions be different? Unknown.

We are being conditioned to be entertained! Oh, Michael Bay, this is entirely your fault. You made your "baysplosions" so alluring and pretty; we couldn't stop watching *Transformers 2*. The *Modern Warfare 2* cut-scene "game" is epic, and in many ways, Bungie suffers from the same problem with *Halo* – set pieces connected with boring corridors. Again, don't misunderstand: this is not a criticism, just an observation – this is why people go to watch Michael Bay films and play games like *Modern Warfare 2*. They go to watch the biggest explosion: that's the reward. Oh, there's the **story**, sure. The 24-style narrative exists to give the illusion of being part of some grand, thought-out plot of plots with plotting plotters who plotted nukes into places they shouldn't be plotted in the first place. Honestly though, have you ever cared about plot in a first-person shooter? Of course not! It's **nice** to have. Like it's nice to have a chocolate flake in your ice cream. But it's just pretext. You'd pay a little extra for it, but you can live without it.

First-person shooters suffer from this cut-scene treatment the most; perhaps because they're the most popular with a certain type of gamer. And excuse my generalisations here: I'm not talking about you, dear reader. The set-piece shooter is for people who don't have any independent imagination, people who are activated by one-way entertainment. First-person shooting is immersive: they think they are the person with the gun – so it's like "being in the movie."

This type of person, who just plays first-person shooting, says all other games "just seem stupid," and those games are usually the types that don't try to completely wrap an alternate reality around you, making you the centre protagonist. Other games pull back a bit and actually make you play the game first as a game, rather than as an immersive reality – the "ultimate lucid dream."

It's safe to say that many people don't want games. They want

entertainment. The interactive first-person shooter is "ultimate entertainment." If we had *Star Trek* holodecks right now, all these people who play *Call of Duty* and **freak out** over it would be playing war simulators in the holodecks so that they could be the action star of their own "Saving Private Vermaak." People who want to play real-time strategy and play games for their game mechanics aren't attracted to the same kind of thing.

To borrow a page from the soothsaying *Idiocracy*: they could make a first-person shooter that is nothing but you firing a slow-motion shotgun loaded with explosions, until the final level which involves getting a headshot off a man made of nothing but nuclear missiles, and it'd be hailed as "Game of the Forever." Hell, I'd play that.

But at the end of the day, the five to seven hour long "entertainment" experience is quickly starting to tip the game-to-cost ratio out of its favour. Six hundred bucks for a median six-hour experience, if you ignore the multiplayer: it's funny how that doesn't seem to factor into all those ten-out-of-ten scores these set-piece shooters are getting. Perhaps that's just the nature of things. The set-piece shooter is the apex predator of the review score savannah: evolved to "skull-hump" a reviewer's brain through the eye sockets so fast and hard that they have no thoughts left other than a desire for more (the sequel) and the sinking feeling that they may have been overcharged by an **already** expensive prostitute, but wouldn't dare admit it.

And this concludes my well thought-out explanation to "RedTide" why I'm more excited about *New Super Mario Bros. Wii* than I am about *Modern Warfare 2**. **NAG**

Extra Reading: <http://malstrom.50webs.com/avalanche.htm>

* *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2* has a Predator missile in it and *New Super Mario Bros. Wii* has a chubby plumber with a moustache in it. I win, Ed.

Modern Warfare 2, you might say, is an **increasingly scripted and very long cut-scene where you just move your cursor around to shoot things** so the explosions don't stop coming all over your face.



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PlayStation
Network



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XBOX
LIVE



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18



BY MIKLÓS SZECSEI

Cake and eat it

I LOVE THE GAMING INDUSTRY – I really do. I love the fact that it provides me with a means to switch off and escape reality. I love the way that I am, in some small way, connected to it. Most of all I love the way it is constantly changing. As gamers, we exist in a state of perpetual acceptance of the fluidity this industry is built on. To most, this acceptance is subconscious, but it still manages to bubble up in the guise of excitement and curiosity towards what is new on the scene; and by “new” I mean innovation, change and development in the industry. One need only look at the stir that Microsoft’s Project Natal caused at last year’s E3 for an example of this.

Change is an inevitable part of life, but it is also what the gaming industry relies on in order to survive (that, and a hefty dose of good old-fashioned capitalism). Without change and innovation, we’d still be playing the original *Pong* or *Spacewar!* – which would be super-awesome because I wasn’t alive back then and I feel as if an essential chunk of my gaming education is missing. I almost feel the urge to endure some self-flagellation using an old serial-port mouse in order to make up for this glaring omission. It’s true: change whisked those early titles away; so far away, in fact, that there is only one system (called a PDP-1) left on the planet that can still play the original *Spacewar!*. Change and innovation continually influence and sculpt our favourite pastime.

New hardware comes out; motherboard architecture changes; updated versions of DirectX power our games; and fresh online services are developed. In short, what exists in the gaming industry today can be deemed fugacious. As a Cancerian I am supposed to oppose and abhor change, and yet I find it the most alluring part of the industry. Perhaps my predilection towards gaming has re-wired the allotted characteristics the zodiac has thrust upon me. Regardless, it is safe to say that in order to survive as a gamer in the industry today, one needs to regard innovation with fervent alacrity. I believe that we do. In fact, I believe that we have come to expect it. If we see no progress or change (even between games and their sequels), we are quick to cry foul and say that there is nothing new that warrants our attention.

Why, then, did everyone get their panties bunched so far up their butts when Activision decided to drop dedicated servers for *Modern Warfare 2* in favour of an in-house matchmaking service, IWNet? Why, then, did the Internet erupt with the fury of a million Zerglings when Blizzard announced there would be no LAN support for *StarCraft II*? And why the hell (this one’s an absolute peach!) did zombie slayers the world over cry with insatiable indignation when Valve announced *Left 4 Dead 2*? What, did everyone want to squeeze three to

four years out of the original *Left 4 Dead*? Bollocks! We’re gamers, we have short attention spans – well, unless you’re into JRPGs I guess. Besides, nobody bats an eyelid when EA releases new versions of the same sports simulator every year.

As much as I adore this industry, there is an element of it that I despise: this inexplicable sentiment that some gamers have about the world revolving around them. Not everyone exhibits this delusional notion of entitlement, but the above-mentioned “travesties” have a tendency to goad this attitude out of many. So, where does this notion stem from? What is the cause of this kneejerk reaction that raises its screeching maw within so many gamers? The only thing I can think of is that it is linked to some subconscious resistance to change. That, or it really is an entitlement issue. I hope it’s the former, as the latter is pathetically insular. People want the new games, but they want them on their terms – it’s a “cake and eat it” scenario. Never mind the fact that the lack of older features may have made room for newer, vastly improved features (just read up on the new Battle.net features – it sounds awesome).

Change in this industry is inevitable. All good things come to an end, but in doing so, they make room for new good things, which we will probably miss when future titles remove them. Who knows, perhaps in fifty years’ time there will only be one working machine capable of running *Modern Warfare 2* – just like *Spacewar!* and the PDP-1. **NAG**

Change is an inevitable part of life,
but it is also what the gaming
industry relies on in order to
survive (that, and a hefty dose of
good old-fashioned capitalism).

**In the April 2010 issue of NAG
things will be changing!**

**Every issue we're always
compromising on:**

content

data

space

stuff


we're tired of all the compromising

We want it all.

So, listen up!

**In the next issue of NAG you must
cast your vote on the future of NAG.**

It'll also look like this on a nasty yellow page.



"You know, with all of the horrible
sphincters you encountered in Dead
Space, some proctology experience
might come in handy."

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ବିଜ୍ଞାନ ଓ ଶିକ୍ଷାମନ୍ତ୍ରାଳୟର ମାଧ୍ୟମରେ

<Dead Space 2: The Search for Peng*>

* We made this up

Dead Space 2. More dead, more space. Of course, *NAG* thought *Dead Space* was just about the best thing ever, and wanted to have its disgusting, rotting babies eat their way out of us, so the announcement of a sequel was just about the second best thing ever. That probably makes *Dead Space 2* better than the best thing ever or something, but we just make this stuff up as we go along. So we're obviously expecting big, huge, shambling things from the sequel. After all, the first one was a survival-horror landmark of brown-pants proportions. It features all sorts of interesting things you wouldn't see in regular, rubbish, wannabe survival horrors (disembowelling, decapitation; dismemberment; disembowelling, decapitation, and dismemberment in zero-G; disembowelling, decapitation, and dismemberment in a vacuum; disembowelling, decapitation, and dismemberment in a zero-G vacuum), as well as lighting and sound on the cutting edge¹ of game design. Anyway, we shipped a whole bunch of Visceral Games' guys off to the bits of the USG Ishimura, and forced them to choose between answering our questions and being shoved out the airlock. They answered our questions, and then we shoved them out the airlock anyway, because one of them thought our viral-marketing pitch was rubbish. So, RIP **Wright Bagwell (Creative Director)**, **Ben Wanat (Senior Production Designer)**, **Ian Milham (Art Director)**, **John Calhoun (Senior Designer)**, and **Steve Papoutsis (Executive Producer)**. ¹We're good with words

<Q & A>

Dead Space was obviously inspired by the underrated cult classic, *Event Horizon*. What underrated cult classic are you looking at now for a sequel? *Sunshine*, *Alien*, or perhaps a hypothetical big-screen adaptation of Alfred Bester's *The Stars My Destination*? Don't you think that villains are awesome?

Steve Papoutsis

"Villain protagonists are way too popular to be cool. We have been scouring YouTube for the next big thing, as well as watching lots of *I Love Lucy* reruns. Survival comedy horror is going to be huge."

What can you tell us about the story and characters? Does the sequel pick up where the first one left off? Is Isaac

Clarke still around? Is Isaac Clarke now a grotesquely misshapen general in the Necromorph queen's army? There's obviously a queen; there's always a queen. Has something worse than Necromorphs turned up?

John Calhoun

'We're keeping the story under wraps right now. But rest assured, Isaac is definitely coming back for a second shot at the Necromorphs. He's more capable and cunning in *Dead Space 2*, and actually brings the fight to the alien menace! Our motto for Isaac is: 'The first time, it could've been anyone. This time, it can only be him.' This basically means that Isaac learnt from all the stuff he witnessed on the Ishimura, and for the inhabitants of the Sprawl (the space station where the game takes place), [he] is their only hope for survival. Isaac also has a new look - his face! You'll be seeing it a lot in

Dead Space 2. But sorry guys, he's not grotesquely misshapen. (At least, not at first...)"

Dead Space did the whole ad hoc engineer-commando thing. What's the sequel going to do? A non-commissioned medical officer armed only with a box of swabs, a tongue depressor, and a modified X-ray gun that fires radiation shells would be cool.

Wright Bagwell

"You know, with all of the horrible sphincters you encountered in *Dead Space*, some proctology experience might come in handy. Experience in amputating with a bone saw might come in handy as well. But we'll see Isaac again, and he's still an engineer by trade."

Speaking of meds, any chance of being able to combine multiple, small med

"We're actually prototyping gaming's first fourth-person camera. The camera will show the action from a theoretical perspective of what 'one' would do in that situation."

kits into a single, large med kit next time around?

Wright Bagwell

"Possibly. We thought of having peanut butter and chocolate pickups that you could combine to create rare, epic snacks that greatly boost Isaac's morale. But early prototypes showed that delicious, gooey chocolaty snacks like that don't withstand the extreme temperatures and pressure differentials of outer space combat very well."

Sound and lighting. Obviously, the film influence was coming through here in *Dead Space*, as these two aspects are typically (scandalously) disregarded in games in favour of whatever passes for amazing graphics at the time.

How did you guys manage to do it all so astonishingly well the first time around, anyway? And how is *Dead Space 2* possibly going to outdo its predecessor in this department?

Ian Milham

"No secrets. Just made it a priority and had people who really knew what they were doing. Many game teams have no dedicated lighters, and leave that to other artists to do. *Dead Space's* lighting team peaked at six people, all with extensive game and film-lighting credits. The sound was no different. We had a great sound team who knew what they were doing. Even if it meant spending \$500 on fruit and produce that they smashed, groped, reamed, and fisted to get disgusting sounds to record. How will we top it for *Dead Space 2*? This time, we're spending \$600."

***Dead Space* managed to create a lot of tension and suspense not by rushing the player with legions of shambling horrors, but rather by not rushing the player at all for long periods. Will *Dead Space 2* adopt a similar approach, or will it be more action-orientated?**

Wright Bagwell

"*Dead Space 2* will have a wider variety of combat experiences. Isaac will be on an emotional roller coaster throughout the game. There will be periods of extreme, prolonged terror, and periods where you feel like Isaac has the upper hand and can take on massive hordes of enemies. We hope that the scares are more memorable after periods of relative safety, and that moments of triumph are that much more satisfying

after a terrifying bout of gameplay."

How is terrifying people in a game different to terrifying people in a film? Aside from subtle sound and visual cues, resource management (there's just never enough ammunition, is there?) seems to be a significant, nightmarish factor in most survival-horror games. In *Dead Space*, it seemed that Isaac could never quite run as fast as he should have, either. You bastards.

Ben Wanat

"This might sound kind of cheap, but simple human conditioning is an easy way to terrify, and videogames are all about conditioned responses."

Game: Stick your hand in the hole.

Player: Nothing happened.

Game: Do it again.

Player: Nothing happened.

Game: Do it again.

Player: Oh my god! You cut my hand off!

Or, better yet...

Game: Stick your hand in the hole.

Player: Oh my god! You cut my hand off!

Game: Do it again.

Player: I am never walking near a hole ever again, let alone sticking any body part into one. In fact, I'm now afraid of anything hole-like in the real world and I will be billing you for the therapy."

A 180 degree quick turn is very useful. Discuss.

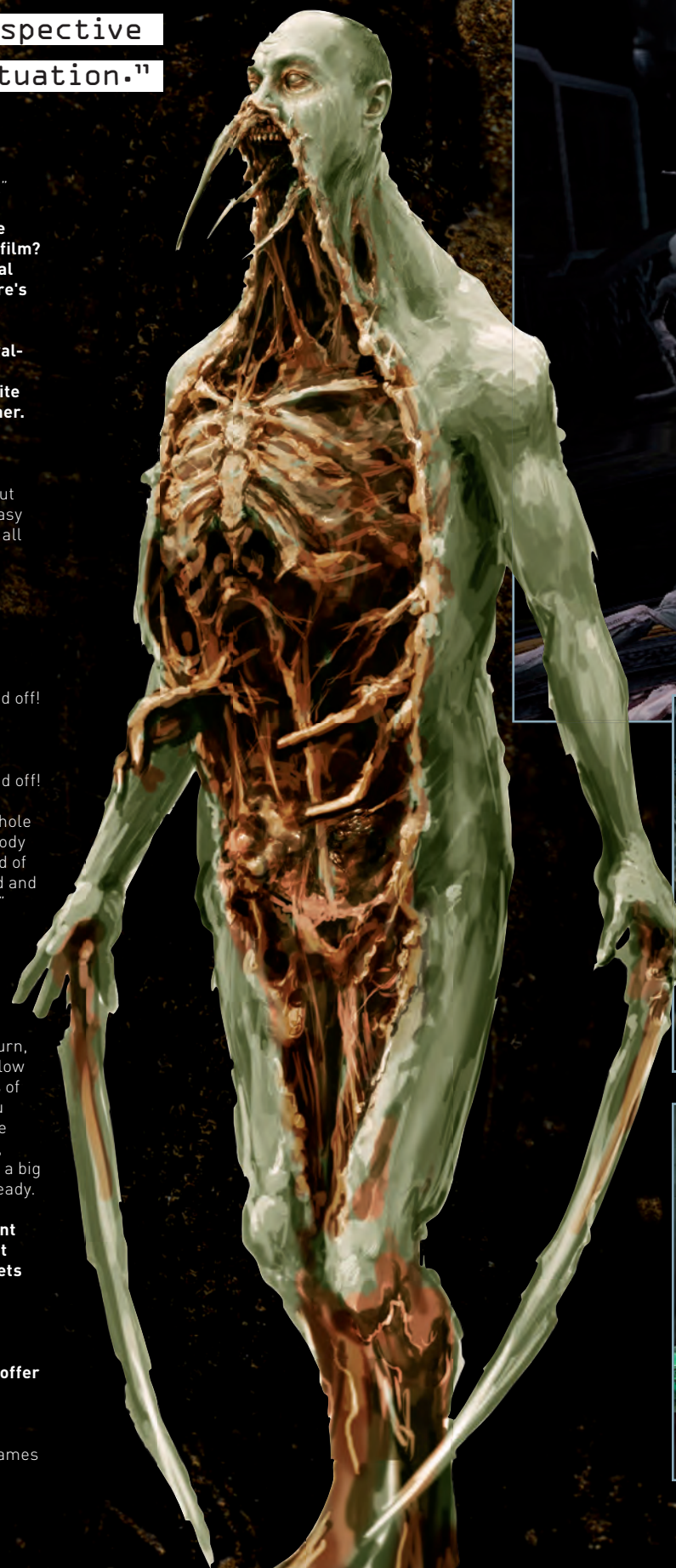
Wright Bagwell

"It is. But rather than reserve a valuable button for a 180-degree turn, we'd rather create controls that allow for quick turning without the press of a valuable button, and still give you the ability to aim with precision. We have been experimenting with this, actually. We have something that's a big improvement over *Dead Space* already."

Tiptoeing to avoid danger? Brilliant idea. Using shadows to hide? What about chucking raw meat or buckets of blood to distract enemies? Deployable turrets? Traps and snares? The Marker is really just a powerful metaphor for self-interested corporate scheming. I offer reasonable hourly rates.

Wright Bagwell

"Avoiding combat works best for games that have combat worth skipping."





We aspire to create combat that's never worth skipping, even if it's often terrifying.

- (a) Not likely.
- (b) Maybe.
- (c) Maybe.
- (d) Definitely.
- (e) Hmm. Right now, it is only making me think of this: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Soft_Ice_cream.jpg

We're assuming that *Dead Space 2* will be a no-HUD zone again. Without all the incumbent distraction, how much easier does this make the job of environment and encounter design? In other words, since you can rely on player immersion, how does this increase the scope of potential action?

Wright Bagwell

"This is a safe assumption, since people really liked the lack of HUD elements in *Dead Space*. It certainly helps a lot in keeping the player immersed, but it's only one of dozens of ingredients we use to immerse the player in the *Dead Space* world. Whatever small effort is saved by it, we apply elsewhere to take immersion even further and to improve the combat set-ups."

Will *Dead Space 2* feature a third-person camera again? Considering all the effort invested in player immersion, the separation between

the player and the camera is an interesting one.

Ian Milham

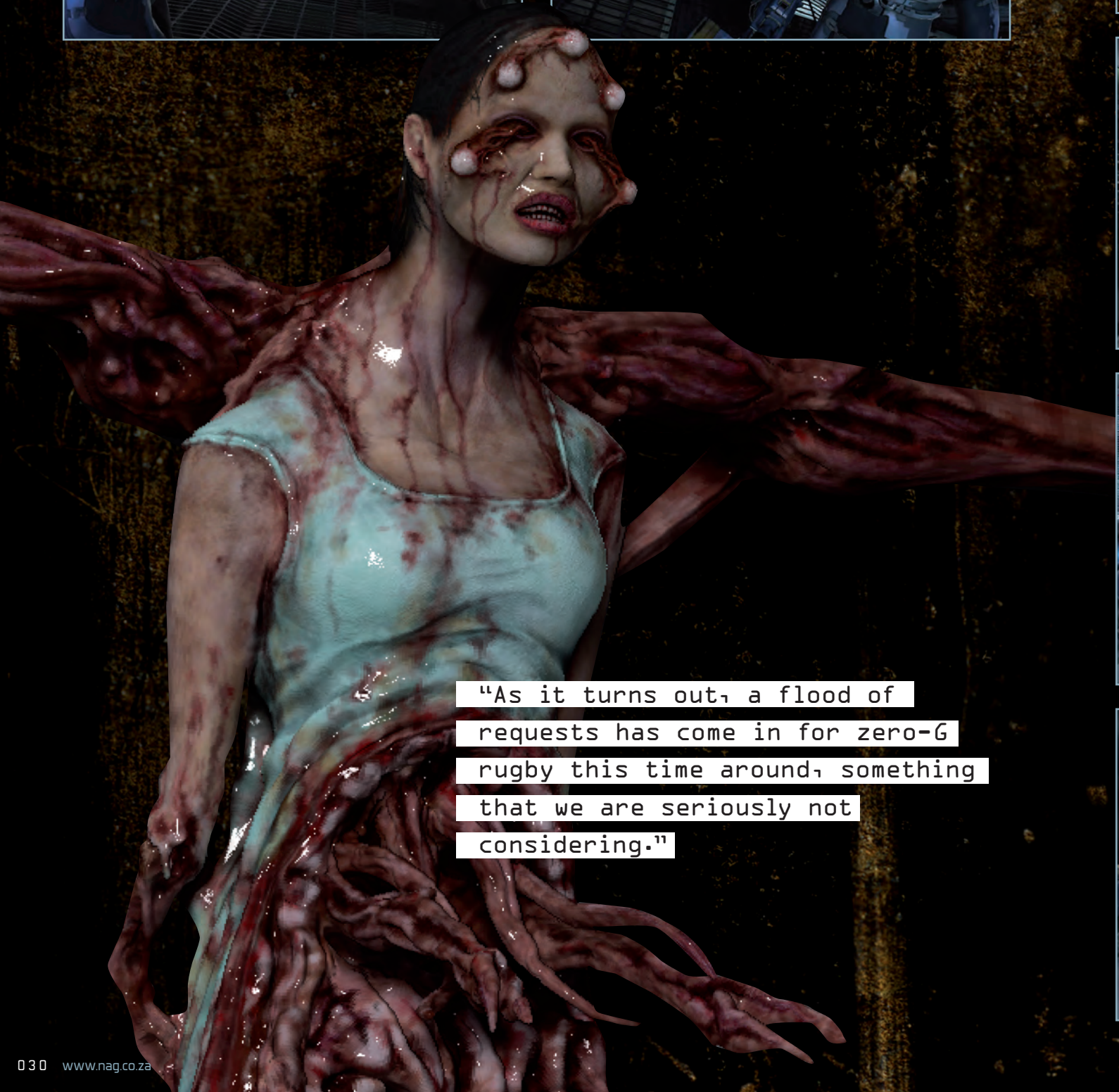
"We're actually prototyping gaming's first **fourth-person** camera. The camera will show the action from a theoretical perspective of what 'one' would do in that situation. Very exciting. Failing that, we'll go back to the third person. It lets us show Isaac as a character and gives us an immediate way to visually set ourselves apart from the ubiquitous FPS crowd."

What criticisms have you taken from *Dead Space*, and intend to fix the second time around? Please strategically dismember the person responsible for the zero-G basketball achievement.

Steve Papoutsis

"As it turns out, a flood of requests has come in for zero-G rugby this time around, something that we are seriously not considering. Folks also tended to want more puppies. Lots of puppies, which is strange as *Dead Space* did not have any. Go figure."

***Dead Space: Extraction* – critical success. Commercially – not so much success. Should Wii owners be shipped off to the Ishimura for their crimes? Also, are any ideas from that**



"As it turns out, a flood of requests has come in for zero-6 rugby this time around, something that we are seriously not considering."



game coming over to *Dead Space 2*?

Steve Papoutsis

"Well, I was thinking that a stint on Aegis VII post-outbreak would work nicely for those non-believers. As far as Ideas from *Extraction*, there are a number of things that worked well, and we are considering including them in *DS2*. Necromorphs, for one, seemed to work."

Will *Dead Space 2* feature any sort of optional side missions alongside the main story, perhaps with weapon upgrades or whatnot as rewards?

Wright Bagwell

"In *Dead Space 2*, Isaac is the one in charge and will usually be the one giving orders. So, there's not much precedent for extracurricular missions. It's all about doing what he has to do to survive. That said, the effort the player spends on exploring and experimenting will be rewarded with plenty of whatnot.... or possibly even peng."

Bearing all this stuff about sound, lighting, suspense and so on in mind, what are the biggest challenges you're now facing, and what are your goals with creating a worthy sequel? Obviously, you want to make an *Aliens* or *Empire Strikes Back* here, and not *Starship Troopers 2*.

Ian Milham

"The biggest challenge is topping ourselves and expanding the *Dead Space* world, while simultaneously surprising but staying true to the fans. Also, and this is an example of us listening to the fans and responding, we're trying to get in as many asteroid-defence mini-games as possible."

Richard Morgan is secretly working on *Dead Space 2*. True or false?

Steve Papoutsis

"Altered Carbon is an awesome book. Getting to meet Richard would be fantastic. Oh yeah... false."

Picture it: *Dead Space 2* is a huge success, and everyone is shouting for another sequel. There's really only so many times a bunch of naïve engineers are going to take repair assignments on mysteriously beleaguered, deep space mining ships before they alert the workers' union. Is there a long-term plan here at all, or is it just a one-at-a-time deal?

Steve Papoutsis

"We have a wheel at work that we spin in order to determine what we think we should do next with the franchise. We don't need some big, fancy plan. Lady luck guides us."

Can we expect another round of epic viral marketing and multimedia content for *Dead Space 2*? The next logical step would obviously be a fully live-action interactive film starring

Ewan McGregor as a contracted geophysicist on a terraforming operation, trapped in a lab under assault from Necromorphs, as he slowly and inexorably slides into insanity as a sort of metaphor for the evil of colonisation. I offer reasonable hourly rates.

Steve Papoutsis

"I think your concept lacks imagination. You don't have any animatronic creatures or unicorns in your pitch... epic fail. As far as viral marketing, that sounds dangerous and mean. We may do some stuff with e-mail and Web junk, and maybe some of those fancy, new-fangled video clip things."

Okay, you're probably going to hate this question (and us, and this magazine, and all the readers) for all the obvious reasons, but is *Dead Space 2* coming with any sort of multiplayer? Co-op? Survival mode? Nazi Necromorphs?

Steve Papoutsis

"*Dead Space 2* will have online multiplayer. I'm not saying any more on this topic right now. Any further questions on this topic will be considered mean-spirited and generally unfunny."

It's too early to start thinking about amazing collector's editions, isn't it? Is it? How about an inflatable Necromorph pool lounge?

Wright Bagwell

"I like where you're going with this. But instead of a pool lounge, how about an inflatable sphincter filled with sticky, liquefied Necromorph innards that you worm your way into?"

What's the wildest suggestion you guys have heard for the sequel? *Dead Space 2: Hot Pursuit*? *Dead Sims in Space*?

Wright Bagwell

"The most horrifying proposal I've heard for *Dead Space 2* was a new enemy called the Butt-Toucher. If Isaac stands still for too long, this guy creeps up behind Isaac, long 'necromorphic' finger extended, and... ←shudders→, I'll stop there. Actually, we haven't had too many suggestions for where to take the game that are off-base, since the first game was a big success. We're trying hard to just take what made *Dead Space* great and greatly expand on it."

Anything else you'd like to tell us about, but we forgot to ask?

Steve Papoutsis

"In all seriousness, thank you for the fun interview and your interest in *Dead Space 2*. The team and I are excited about what we are working on, and having folks like you express interest in the game is super cool. Thanks for the interview and I hope we can do another one soon." **NAG**





Jumping the shark?

The phrase "jump the shark," originally referring to a climactic scene in the American TV series *Happy Days* in which the character Fonzie jumps over a shark on water skis, has come to denote the point when something spins off into the absurd. "It's a moment. A defining moment when you know that your favourite television programme [or game] has reached its peak. That instant that you know from now on... it's all downhill," said John Hein, friend of Sean J. Connolly (who originally coined the term).



SKATE 3

Could SKATE 3 be "jumping the shark" the way that other franchise did?

Genre→ Sports

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

SO SOON AFTER THE release of the much-improved *SKATE 2*, Electronic Arts already has the next one queued up and ready for release, no less than a year after the previous one. While we're certainly eager for more *SKATE* – a franchise that revitalised and reinvigorated an ageing, hawkish genre that long since forgot what it was supposed to be about – we're also wary of EA turning *SKATE* into yet another of their yearly, iterative sports formulas that see little in the way of evolution. Such rapid releases also run the risk of falling prey to misguided fads, as executives scramble to think of ways to make the next underwhelming addition "hip" for the youths. But suspicions aside, and enough

with the asinine all-caps naming of the franchise...

According to Electronic Arts, *SKATE 3* "breaks new ground by taking all of the camaraderie and competitive excitement of real-life skateboarding and brings it to the hands of gamers." Okay, so what does this mean? It seems that offline or online, players can now team up to build a "skate crew," which represents a kind of co-op experience. Players have their own roles within the team, like video editor or architect, and when you do things that benefit the team from within your role, like filming your team or building a skate park, the entire team gets experience from it. Being able to hop online and act as camera guy to film your buddies thrashing is awesome. And the emphasis on "camaraderie and competitive excitement"? The jury is out on that



one until we see more of the game. But it does "smell" as if EA is trying to sell the pre-packaged "trendy" version of skateboarding here, instead of the pure uncut vision that *SKATE* originally introduced.

Players will participate in team-based challenges, compete against rival crews, and "leave their mark on the all-new skater's paradise, Port Carverton." Goodbye San Vanelona, you were great. Hello Port Carverton and your skateboard-embracing nature. No more security guards, just a huge city built for skateboarders. Port Carverton is split into three districts – University, Downtown and Industrial – and we're told that each district will be the size of the entire San Vanelona. Three times bigger; three times better, right? Part of the campaign focus of *SKATE 3* will

Pre-order bonus

If you pre-order *SKATE 3*, you'll get an unlock code for exclusive access to the iconic Black Box Distribution Skate Park, home turf of skate teams Zero, Mystery and Fallen. Black Box Distribution, founded in 2000 by Jamie Thomas, distributes some of skateboarding's biggest selling brands.

Players will participate in team-based challenges, **compete against rival crews, and "leave their mark" on the all-new skater's paradise, Port Carverton.**



be winning access to blank areas of the city where you can build your own skate parks, though very little is shown of this mechanic.

"The social and community aspects of the *SKATE* franchise are something we've always embraced, but we've never done anything to the scale you're going to see in *SKATE 3*," said Senior Producer, Jason DeLong. "We're giving gamers a very unique experience by providing them with the tools they need to build their ultimate team or to create a team comprised entirely of their online friends. From there, it's all about proving yourself, teaming up, and throwing down."

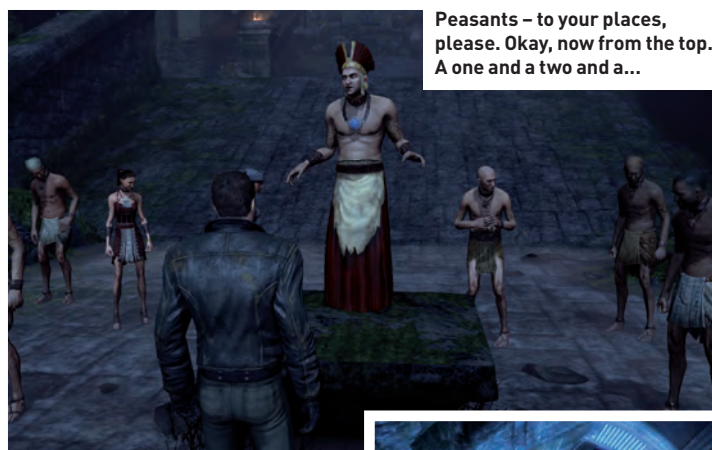
The Hall of Meat mode has been beefed up to reward epic bails and fails with even more... rewards, of some kind. We're assuming experience points. There's a new Skate.School to help

players of all skill levels "kill it", says EA, unable to stop themselves from putting hip slang into the press release. The Skate.Create feature suite expands to allow the creation of custom graphics, more control over recording videos, and the ability to create and share skate parks. In terms of moves, dark slides and underflips are now present. We're going to have to trust Wikipedia on this one: "The dark slide is a skateboarding trick that is similar to a boardslide, but with the skateboard face up. The skateboarder thus slides perpendicularly on an obstacle, feet set on the face-side of the nose and tail." And the underflip is "a flip trick performed by flicking the skateboard from the underside of the skateboard." Radical.

Based on what was shown so far, the character models for the players look

a little strange. The environment, while massive, looks a bit bland. The focus on multiplayer seems a little overbearing. Perhaps it's just us, but skateboarding was never about "being part of a crew." That's just the competitive side of it that sprung up as the activity gained popularity. Skateboarding, if you talk to skateboarders, is about you, your board and the environment – the "Zen" of it all. This whole "crew" thing seems like an attempt to force people into multiplayer, which, as we all know, is the best place to monetise the whole thing. Don't be evil, Electronic Arts. We love *SKATE*. But don't go all hip-fad-trendy-baggy-pants-brigade to grab more of the teenage market. That's what that other guy's skateboarding game did. And look where it ended up. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon



Dark Void

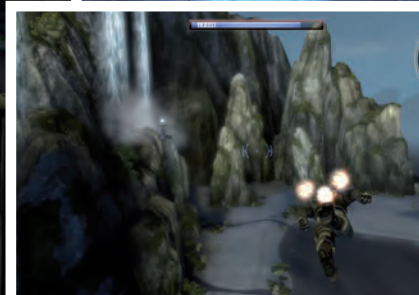
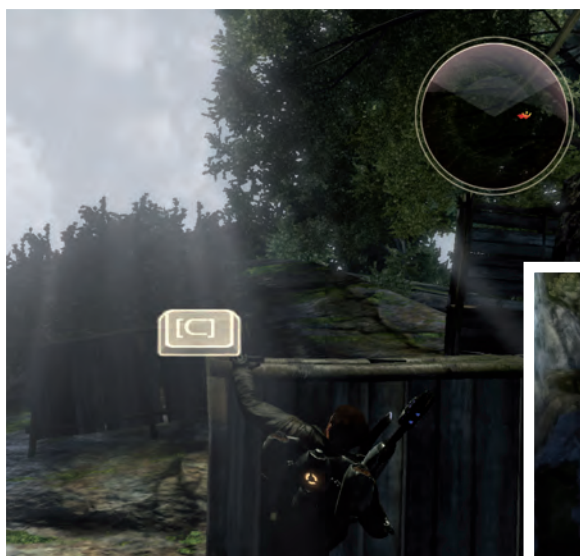
I think we're gonna need a helmet

Genre→ Third-Person Action Adventure
PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

WHEN YOUR PLANE IS sucked into a vortex that sends you plummeting through the space-time continuum, you know you've been flying through the Bermuda Triangle. Such is the fate of William Augustus Grey, ex-military pilot, smartass and tough guy, and his ex-girlfriend, Ava. After a violent and mysterious storm, the two find themselves trapped in a strange world, and before long, discover a civilisation of humans who are dominated by a strange alien race known as The Watchers. Grey is no hero, but finds himself thrown into the middle of a rebellion led by Nikola Tesla, who turns out to be one of many humans from our reality trapped in the world known as The Void.

Dark Void takes cues from a number of genres, the most notable of which is the typical third-person action adventure. There are strong references to *Gears of War* and *Uncharted* in *Dark Void* (Grey even looks a little like Drake). Grey can hide behind cover, fire blindly from behind it, dive to other bits of cover and perform high-damage close-range attacks. But with *Dark Void*, everything is turned on its head. Cover and level traversing operates on two planes – horizontal, which you should be familiar with, and vertical. The platform system draws from classic platform games like the original *Prince of Persia*, in that Grey can leap between platforms above and below each other. He can also use these platforms as cover, hanging off the edge and ducking behind when the bullets come flying.

The reason why Grey can perform these feats of vertical luncacy is because he has a jetpack strapped to his back.



Initially only able to provide a hover ability, but later capable of completely free flight, this device is what separates *Dark Void* from the rest of the pack. Grey can rapidly shift between the three types of movement – ground-based, hovering and free flight – and will often need to, to accomplish his goals. While he's flying around the massive, open (or sometimes, tight and challenging) spaces, Grey can fire his jetpack's machine guns at enemies, perform aerial manoeuvres and even hijack (and fly) enemy craft in mid-air, which is followed by a surprisingly fitting series of quick-time events.

The result of this combination of genres is something quite special and unique. Our time with the preview code reminded us of a mix of *Tribes*, *Uncharted*, and

Shadow of the Colossus-style boss battles, plenty of *Crimson Skies* (the development team behind *Dark Void* is largely made up of those who worked on the Xbox version of *Crimson Skies: High Road to Revenge*) and, of course, the 1991 film *The Rocketeer*. Everything is layered with a healthy dose of wit, boisterous behaviour and believable character interactions that give the game a real charm. The only real concern right now is whether the developers will be able to have everything ready, polished and perfectly balanced in time for the game's release in January. They've set their goals high with *Dark Void*. We hope they don't end up tripping over themselves in an attempt to outdo everyone else.

NAG
Geoff Burrows

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Judges' decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into.



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Super Street Fighter IV

You know it's going to be good when it has "super" in the title...

Genre→ Fighting

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

HOW DO YOU MAKE the best return of a classic fighting franchise better, when its gallant strut back into the limelight was pretty damn good to begin with? You make it super, and re-release the entire game with even more content jammed into it, at half the price.

Too large to be downloadable content, *Super Street Fighter IV* will arrive as a retail disc, but at half the price of a regular retail game, with twice the content of the original *Street Fighter IV*. To appease owners of the original, Capcom has hinted at bonus features that'll be available if you keep your *Street Fighter IV* disc when upgrading to *SSFIV*.

The bulk of *SSFIV* comes from its ten additional characters (two new and eight returning from previous *Street Fighter* titles), the return of the Car and Barrel special stages from *Street Fighter II* and improved online modes. The returning 25 characters from *SFIV* will also each get an additional Ultra Move, as the ten new characters all come with three Ultras right out of the box. This works well for the *Street Fighter II* characters that are being included, as they get to keep their three Special Arts from their original game. Producer Yoshinori Ono mentioned that all returning characters

and new characters have been completely rebalanced (take that, Sagat players!).

Confirmed in the new roster are returning characters T. Hawk and Dee Jay. A leaked list earlier this year rumoured the return of these two, as well as the new characters Juri and Hakaan, and *Street Fighter* favourites Dudley, Makoto, Adon, Guy, Cody and Ibuki, so we may as well consider the list legit. Rumours are that Adon might be swapped out for Rolento (*Final Fight*, *Street Fighter Alpha II* and *III* and the most requested character), as a stage containing Rolento's henchmen working on a skyscraper over the cityscape from *Final Fight* (complete with a giant, gold statue of Haggar) has already been shown. In an interview with Yoshinori Ono, Ibuki and Makoto were all but confirmed.

The enhanced online play includes two new modes: Team Battles where up to eight players can enjoy 2 vs. 2, 3 vs. 3, or 4 vs. 4 team elimination battles, and Endless Battle where eight players throw down in true arcade fashion where the winner stays on and plays against the next guy in line. Spectators can chat with each other as they watch. The Replay Channel is getting fixed up: players can view recorded matches together and discuss them. After launch, an improved user-controlled Tournament Mode is promised as DLC. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

New Challengers

Juri: She's a Korean tae kwon do fighter (the first in the series to use the style), and the perfect mirror to C. Viper's fast and agile brawling. Juri works as a spy for S.I.N., the organisation that brought rise to Seth (and his annoying crotch-rocket Ultra). She's got a ki-boosting device called the "Feng Shui Engine" implanted in her left eye. Badass.

Hakaan: Little is known about Hakaan, other than that he's a Middle Eastern grappler, presumably to mirror Abel's rough-and-close Shoto-denial grappling style.





DARK VOID 10

Coming Soon!

16
www.pegi.info

NuMetro
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interactive



PLAYSTATION 3



XBOX 360.



Games for Windows



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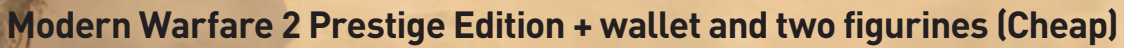


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1ST PRIZE



2ND PRIZE



The Reviewers

As part of NAG's "QuickSave Our Children" effort, for Christmas we sponsored nine non-existent kids and gave them candy and let them do our writing for us this month. Then we sent them back to the orphanage.

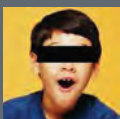
Miktar Dragon: I like the fun colourful games but they don't let me have those anymore. They're for babies.



Walt Pretorius: One day I hope to be a real writer just like the real Walt but without being so angry.



Dane Remendes: This is so amazing it's really amazing oh my goodness this game is so awesome oh it ended.



Tarryn van der Byl: These cookies taste kind of funny are you sure these are raisins and not grapes?



Chris Bistline: Trust your intuition. The universe is guiding your life. Lucky numbers 3, 8, 10, 13, 17, 19.



Michael James: Genius is eternal patience. Michael told me to write this. He doesn't let me write my own stuff.



Adam Liebman: I'm a doctor! Also, Adam isn't a girl, but I am, and I know the difference! Boys are icky.



Geoff Burrows: They promised me that they'd adopt me but I think they're lying. Stupid grownups.



Alex Jelagin: Watashi wa rikai shi te i mase n. Anata wa dare? Kore wa nani desu ka?



Anatomy of a Review

A quick guide to the NAG Reviews section

VITAL INFO: Who made it, who's putting it on shelves and where to find more information

GAME NAME: It'd be a bit confusing if we left this bit out. Now it comes with a short summary, too!

BOX OUTS: More good stuff. Just in a box.

Review
Developer: Capcom Publisher: Capcom Distributor: The Game Machine Website: www.streetfighter.com

Street Fighter IV
Don't call it a comeback or retro-revival this is fighting redefined

Genre and Platforms: What kind of game is it, and what platforms does it come on. All available platforms are in white, the one we reviewed it on is in yellow.

Captions: A picture's worth a thousand words. Here's 20 or so...

Screenshots and Artwork: The game looks something like this, presumably

The Score
The Score is a number out of 100. It's based on the review, the bottom line, and the Plus/Minus. The Score is a number out of 100. It's based on the review, the bottom line, and the Plus/Minus.

Award: Is this game worthy of our praise? If so, it gets an award. See details below.

Multiplayer Icons: How many players per copy, players per server, and players in co-op, respectively

Plus/Minus: What we liked, and what we didn't, in concise bullet-point format

The Bottom Line: Here's where we condense the entire review into 20 words or less. Because reading is hard...

Editor's Choice Award
If a game bears this award, then it rocks. It does everything right - pure and simple. We don't hand these out every issue.

Must Play Award
Essential playing for fans of the genre. These awards aren't as rare as the Editor's Choice award, but if you see one, take note.

Pony Award
This isn't an award anyone can be proud of. If a game gets this award, then it's rubbish and you should avoid it like moss on a sandwich. We keep it only for the best garbage.

The Score

Breaking down the box

AWARD: Is this game worthy of our praise? If so, it gets an award. See details below.

MULTIPLAYER ICONS: How many players per copy, players per server, and players in co-op, respectively

PLUS/MINUS: What we liked, and what we didn't, in concise bullet-point format

THE BOTTOM LINE: Here's where we condense the entire review into 20 words or less. Because reading is hard...

The Score

Plus
+ Simple yet deep
+ Balanced
+ Challenging

Minus
- Lacks better instruction
- Medals only awarded for online play

Bottom Line
A true evolution for the series that knows what to keep and what to cut.

Score
Further reducing our bottom line to a number out of 100

97

What We're Playing

Here are the top 20 games we're currently playing in the NAG office

#	GAME NAME
1	Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 MP
2	Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2 SP/Spec Ops
3	There are other games?
Why yes, in fact there are!	
4	Borderlands
5	Dragon Age: Origins
6	Assassin's Creed II
7	Plants vs. Zombies
8	Battlefield: Bad Company 2 Beta
9	Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare
10	DJ Hero
11	Forza Motorsport 2
12	Forza Motorsport 3
13	GTA IV: Episodes from Liberty City
14	Guitar Hero 5
15	Gyromancer
16	Left 4 Dead 2
17	Machinarium
18	Tropico 3

Distributors

Apex Interactive	[011] 796-5040
Asbis	[011] 848-7000
ASUS SA	[011] 783-5450
Axiz	[011] 237-7000
Comstar	[011] 314-5812
Comstek	0860 600 557
Core Group	[087] 940-3000
Corex	[011] 655-8800
Cosmic Comics	[011] 476-9640
Drive Control Corporation	[011] 201-8927
EA South Africa	[011] 516-8300
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Foxcomp	[011] 912-6300
Frontosa	[011] 466-0038
Incredible Connection	0860 011 700
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Legend Memory	[011] 314-0817
Logitech SA	[011] 656-3375
Look & Listen	[011] 467-3717
Megarom	[011] 361-4800
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Pinnacle	[011] 265-3000
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Ster Kinekor Entertainment	[011] 445-7700
Syntech	0861 274 244
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If your company isn't listed here, phone NAG on [011] 704-2679

Web Scores

How do our scores compare to everyone else's? We've provided scores from Metacritic and Game Rankings for reference.

NAG // Metacritic // Game Rankings

CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE 2



PC

95
86
88

DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS



PC

90
91
91

ASSASSIN'S CREED II



360

95
91
93

RATCHET & CLANK FUTURE: A CRACK IN TIME



PS3

86
86
88

DJ HERO



360

89
84
85

WWE SMACKDOWN VS. RAW 2010



PS3

83
82
81

NEED FOR SPEED: NITRO



WII

70
68
72



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Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2

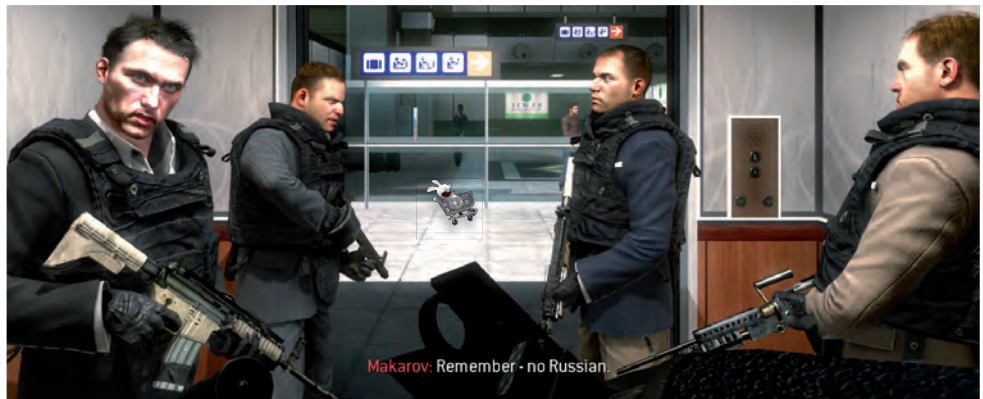
It's just a crap game...

Genre→ First-Person Shooter

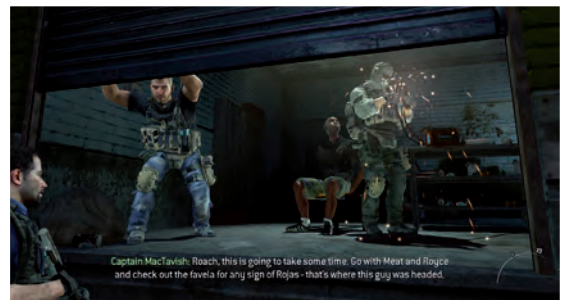
PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

DOES THE SUBHEADING CONFUSE you? Does it make you angry? Does it offend you? If so, calm down buddy. If you thought for even a second that there was any way that I would give Infinity Ward's latest masterpiece anything but the highest praise, then you are a fool*. If it crossed your mind for even a moment that I was going to use anything but the most awesome, most obviously made up adjectives (like "splendiferific" and "wonderlicious" – sure, I made them up, but they're still pretty bad-ass, aren't they?) to describe the delight that is *Modern Warfare 2*, then you are horribly, **horribly** mistaken. The pages you are reading at the moment deal with the game's single-player campaign, as well as the cooperative Spec Ops mode. If you're only in it for the multiplayer, turn the page to read some opinions on it from around the NAG offices. All right then – now that we've thinned out the herd (and probably offended a few thousand readers), let's get down to business...

Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2's single-player story begins five years after the mess that players made in the original *Modern Warfare*. The events of the first game were basically just the metaphorical spark that ignites the world-consuming inferno that *Modern Warfare 2* engages you in. I won't spoil anything for you, but I will say this: things get pretty crazy. Like world-shattering-type crazy. Infinity Ward has somehow taken *Modern Warfare*'s single-player component and upped the intensity, action and overwhelming set pieces a thousand times over for this sequel. If you

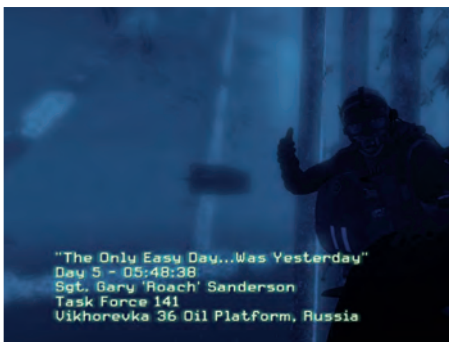


didn't play through the original game's single player, firstly, shame on you, and secondly, understand that this is no easy feat: *Modern Warfare*'s single-player component was already ridiculously action packed and wonderfully intense. We had many heated discussions around the NAG office leading up to the sequel's release regarding the single player and how the hell the developers were going to top that of the original game. We should've trusted Infinity Ward a bit more,





Every mission in the game has at least one moment that makes your eyes bleed into pools of blood that bond together to form the letters "O-M-G". Pretty epic, huh?



That nondescript piece of land is about to take a serious pounding. Who needs a reason to fire missiles filled with awesome anyway?



because they've managed to pull it off with resounding success.

The game's story, while it can be a bit nonsensical and misleading at times (it all makes sense by the time you reach the end of it, however), is delivered in breathtaking fashion. Every mission in the game is like a massive piece of awesome that was cut from the flesh of the Gaming Gods themselves. If awesome could be given a physical form, *Modern Warfare 2* would be it – it's so awesome... All

right, I'm out of colourful ways to use the word awesome. It's packed with some of the most beautifully crafted and most cinematic set pieces that I've ever had the pleasure of witnessing in a game. It just doesn't hold back – you'll be engaged in a nail-biting snowmobile chase on a snow-covered mountaintop one second to a riveting, perilous romp as you pursue a high-value target through a Brazilian shantytown the next. Each moment that passes in the game is more intense,

Second Opinion

Five years on from *Modern Warfare's* shocker finale, and things didn't quite work out. Dead ultranationalist bastard, Imran Zakhaev, is now some sort of hero and martyr because, all your previous efforts notwithstanding, the ultranationalists managed to seize control of Russia anyway. Meanwhile, Zakhaev's erstwhile lieutenant (and even bigger bastard) Vladimir Makarov is plotting all sorts of vengeance.

Modern Warfare's second tour of duty is really just more of the same I'm-a-\$100-million-movie-pretending-to-be-a-videogame, now with more snowmobiles, electromagnetic pulses, and wildly improbable plot devices. Expect lots of big explosions, lots of non-specific foreign accents bawling "GRANATA!", and lots of Soap "the Soaphawk" Soap being totally *not* butch.

Once you're done with the single player, there's a bunch of Special Ops extras, and when you hit the Echo missions, you'll see where the "Veteran" in "Veteran" got to. I mean, high explosive. Seriously? Seriously? Elsewhere, of course, it's all the *Call of Duty* multiplayer we know and love, especially now that they've chucked in the instant darling Care Package kill streak reward. There's really nothing quite as sublime as dropping an AC-130 in the first 40 seconds of a match (true story). Simply, *MW2* is absolutely terrific.

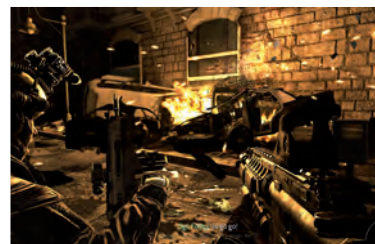
Tarryn van der Byl



Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed to so many by so few" - Prime Minister Winston Churchill



Overlord: Uh, negative Two-One Actual multiple casevacs along the Potomac



more chaotic and more fun to battle through than that which preceded it. The story, as I said before, does become a bit arbitrary and tends to jump all over the place, but trust me: it's really worth all of it to reach the game's epic conclusion. You'd honestly be doing yourself a terrible disservice to leave the single player untouched. Be aware, however, that the experience doesn't last very long and the single player can be completed in less than five hours.

While the campaign cannot be played cooperatively, Infinity Ward has included a number of specially crafted scenarios, which you and a buddy can tackle together in order to earn stars to unlock new Spec Ops missions. These scenarios range from missions that were pulled from the single player to a few that were created from scratch specifically to be played cooperatively. Split up into five tiers representing difficulty, each Spec Ops mission rewards players with up to three stars based on their performance in each scenario. Each progressive tier is unlocked by earning a certain number of stars in the preceding tiers. Believe me when I say that most of these missions are astoundingly difficult, especially if you're trying to earn the maximum number of stars. They definitely make for good times when you're done with the single player and they're a worthwhile addition to an already amazing game.

From a technological point of view, the game is definitely an improvement. Whether you're playing on console or PC, everything is better looking this time around, and it's nice to see some colour in the game (as Michael also states in his multiplayer box out). Almost every object in the game is now physics enabled, sending objects and debris flying in spectacular fashion every time

an explosion occurs (and there are many, **many** explosions in this game). Grenades, in particular, are much more terrifying now that they benefit from the physics engine. You'll see what I mean when you're sitting on a downward slope and a grenade casually comes rolling by to deliver its deadly payload all over your stunned, confused and newly cratered face. One facet of the game that deserves a very special mention is the musical score. As you may know, Hans Zimmer (who composed music for films like *The Dark Knight* and *Gladiator*) contributed to the game's music and it adds to the atmosphere and fantastically epic feel of the game in a way that only a great composition can.

Despite all the controversy surrounding the game (prior to its release) for silly things like its lack of dedicated servers and inclusion of certain missions that people – specifically those who are of the opinion that they're way more important than they actually are – deemed offensive, Infinity Ward has made a huge success out of *Modern Warfare 2* – and they absolutely deserve it. They've crafted a

game that will forever be remembered as a hugely significant milestone in digital storytelling. There's no other way to put it. It's hard to imagine how they could possibly top the excellence of *Modern Warfare 2* with their next title. It doesn't really matter: somewhere deep down, I know they'll pull it off. After all, in Infinity Ward we trust... **NAG**

Dane Remendes



Plus	Minus
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Awesome single player + Awesome multiplayer + Awesome game 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Single-player campaign is short

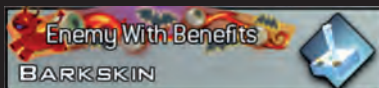
Bottom Line
Take everything that was awesome about the first *Modern Warfare*, multiply it by, like, a thousand, and you've got *Modern Warfare 2*. It's that simple.

AVAILABLE AT
Look & Listen
For the Fans



Multiplayer Madness

Dane "Barkskin" Remendes



Occupation: Anti-Camper
Preferred Map Location: "In ur base, killin' ur d00ds..."
Favourite Weapon | Perk:
 P90 Akimbo | Lightweight

Anyone who has played *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare* online knows that it's fun, so I'm not going to waste time that you could be spending playing its sequel reiterating that fact. However, now that *Modern Warfare 2* is out, there's really no reason why you should be playing the original online. It's essentially more of the same, but *MW2*'s multiplayer component is just more fun, more addictive and more awesome than its predecessor ever was.

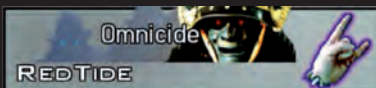
There's so much stuff to tinker with and unlock that I can actually picture the developers at Infinity Ward sitting around after the release of the original, discussing multiplayer changes and saying, "Yeah, *CoD4*'s multiplayer was nice and all, but we still feel like there's more s*** that we can throw at the player to make it more, we don't know... **amazing**" – and it shows. The new, customisable kill streak rewards (and the death streaks), the upgradable perks, the new weapon attachments and all the wonderful new stuff to play with turn this into a game that could become *World of Warcraft*'s main competition for the title of "Greatest Number of Hopelessly Addicted Players Ever". Don't get me wrong: I'm definitely going to miss my server browser and the better pings of dedicated servers. I'm going to miss being able to rank up my profile in LAN games. I'm going to miss a bunch of things about the way *CoD* used to handle its multiplayer.

IWNet is not perfect, but it's still in its infancy. It's got a long way to go, but we're already seeing slight improvements. We'll have to wait and see what happens, but as it stands, *MW2*'s multiplayer is still just too much fun to pass up on.

Play it, damn it... if only so I can get a few frags off you online...



Michael "RedTide" James



Occupation: Professional Griefer
Preferred Map Location: Imagine the most ridiculous place possible on the map you're playing... and that's where he'll be. Either that, or he's stealing your Care Packages.
Favourite Weapon | Perk:
 AA-12 w/ FMJ | Cold-Blooded

I'm not going to bitch about the lack of dedicated servers and the befuddling matchmaking process and the fact that you can't switch teams, vote to kick cheaters off and so on. Oh wait, there's also the painful camping (otherwise known as sniping or "I'm just guarding the bomb site guys") and grenade launcher killing (otherwise known as "n00b tubing" or "I'm just trying to level my gun guys") and the overly powerful crate drops and... Oh, wait... I said I wasn't going to bitch.

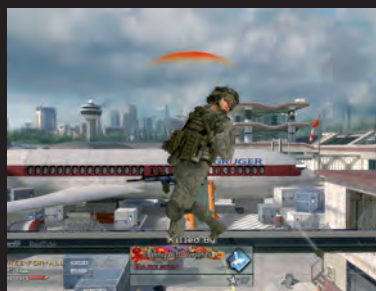
Regardless, I'm sure it'll all be patched away eventually and everyone will be happy (even the hardcore, competitive clan dudes). Overall, the game is like a drug habit: you'll keep on doing it while ignoring the gaps in your smile and bank account.

What I must get across here is that the multiplayer game of *Modern Warfare 2* is a digital addiction. You've got tons of weapons and a million (okay, 594) different call signs and emblems (294) to unlock for various achievements, such as getting two headshots from a single bullet and absorbing X amount of damage with the riot shield. It's got all the levelling you'll ever need with 70 levels (ranks) to attain and then you can do it all over again and again to unlock the ten levels of prestige (at a normal rate of play, this amounts to around 720 hours of play until everything is unlocked!).

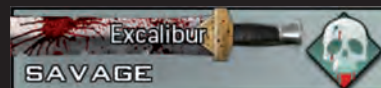
It's madness, and even now while I'm writing this, I'm thinking about the next game and what perks I need to level up to unlock the next rank a little quicker. Let's also not forget that you can now unlock kill streak rewards that range from counter UAV to a tactical nuke.

Besides all the cool, fun new toys and stuff, the game is silky smooth, almost like an arcade shooter – if that makes any sense. It's very polished and with plenty of colour in all the levels for a change. Never fear, there's still enough grey concrete and mud, but everything is dotted with colour now, like washing hanging between buildings and posters and graffiti.

If you get past all the server issues and lag and so on, the game underneath is the best on the market. Until the next game Infinity Ward releases, that is.



Chris "SAVAGE" Savides



Occupation: Master Assassin/Butcher
Preferred Map Location: He's right behind you...
Favourite Weapon | Perk: Knife | Commando

KNIFING 101

Let me start off by saying that I don't play *Modern Warfare 2*'s multiplayer like most people do. I hate campers, and I refuse to become what I hate. Where's the fun in sitting in one spot the entire game, aiming down a heat-sensing scope and sniping? There is none if you ask me, and I hate filthy little sniping campers. Phew... glad I got that off my chest.

While others may prefer a sniper rifle, my weapon of choice is the knife. There's no greater feeling of satisfaction and sadistic glee than sprinting up to an opponent who is trying to shoot you, getting to him before his bullets can take you down, and savagely ramming the knife into his skull. I like to believe there's an art to this – all you need to do is follow these three simple rules:

Rule 1: Cardio (yes, I stole it from *Zombieland*. What are you going to do about it?)
 Set your first perk slot to Marathon. You'll need this to perpetually sprint and avoid those bullets as you go in for the kill. Serpentine movement is the key to great knife kills.

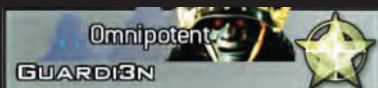
Rule 2: Go Commando (okay, the underpants are off – now what? Ed)
 This lets you knife from a greater distance, and once you've unlocked the Pro version, you'll be able to leap from buildings and avoid taking damage when you land. This, combined with Marathon, will transform you into a leaping, knifing, stabbing maniac. Basically, a Batman-style pain in the ass (trust me, I'd know – I never hear the end of the complaining).

Rule 3: Warp Speed
 Lightweight allows you to move faster. Combined with the other two perks, you really do become a handful, and you'll hardly ever need to fire a shot. Sure, you might die a few more times than usual, but at the same time you'll be having way more fun. To all those I've knifed online: it's been a pleasure. To those who have not yet felt the cold steel of my blade: watch your back...



Multiplayer Madness

Lauren "Guardien" das Neves



Occupation: Tank/Professional Ass-Kicker
Preferred Map Location: Somewhere near the big 'splotions.
Favourite Weapon | Perk: SCAR-H w/ Red-Dot Sight | Cold-Blooded

DIARY OF AN ONLINE MW2 ADDICT

I am really, really cured now. No, really. I just need to get 12 more headshots with my SCAR-H and 26 close-range kills to earn 10,000 XP for Scrambler.

Oh look, I've just unlocked Last Stand Pro. I wonder what that does? Gotta check it out quick.

Awesome – all the NAG CoD players have just logged onto Steam. Must make sure I'm invisible to Savage when he joins. Just keep getting knifed by him. How humiliating.

LOL ... Barksin is getting hero worshipped for working at NAG. If only they knew.

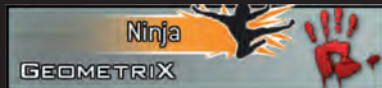
MUST STOP PLAYING NOW! Eyes are burning. Fingers are cramped. Okay, one more map. Argh! It's Rundown – keep getting owned on this one. Vote to skip. Seriously people, come on now! How hard is it just to click a button? Finally – Terminal. I can do this. Think I might go steal some crates and plant some sentry guns. Shame, there's a level 6 on the other team. N00b.

Ha, ha ... took down an enemy chopper with my Stinger. I just got a Flyswatter title for that. That's random. Woohoo – level 43. I rock!

ROFL. It's Saturday night and EVERYONE is playing. Sheesh people, get a life already...



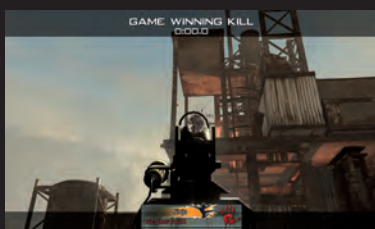
Geoff "GeometriX" Burrows



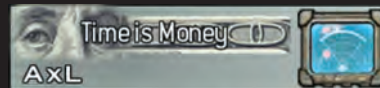
Occupation: Kill Streak Reward Analyst
Preferred Map Location: On top of the skybox.
Favourite Weapon | Perk: SCAR-H w/ Grenade Launcher | Cold-Blooded

It's awesome! No, really, it is. Yes, there are a million reasons to cry over the lack of dedicated servers. Yes, it was nigh unplayable during the first week of release because of the local anti-PC "boycott." Yes, it's almost impossible to find an online game that's not Team Deathmatch. And, no, you cannot earn XP in a private game. But, and this is an important thing when it comes to gaming, it is fun.

There's just so much to do: perks, guns and add-ons to unlock and level-up, people to kill, tactics to discover, and knives to stab into RedTide's face when he comes crashing around a corner. There's also a fully automatic shotgun, portable laser-guided missile launchers and more sneaky routes through each map than you'd expect from an iBurst clan during competitive play. The international IWNet whinge-fest has its merits, because, well, it kind of breaks a lot. But when you're not punching walls in frustration, you'll realise that MW2 doesn't just have more stuff than CoD4, it's actually, dare I say, better. And, at the rate Infinity Ward is developing patches that are fixing many of the game's troubles, it's going to get even better.



Chris "Axl" Bistline



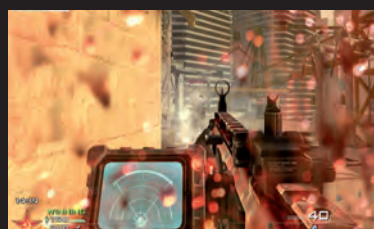
Occupation: Heart Surgeon
Preferred Map Location: He's watching you from the shadows right now...
Favourite Weapon | Perk: SCAR-H w/ Heartbeat Sensor | Stopping Power

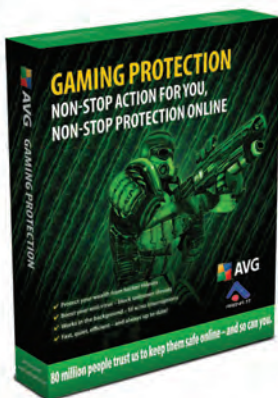
Let me make something very clear: I love *Modern Warfare 2's* multiplayer. It's absolutely the most fun, addictive game I've ever had the pleasure of playing. I'd love to do nothing more than play it all day long. But that's the problem: it's bloody difficult to actually play a game.

Okay, now do take this with a grain of salt: I'm on a 3G connection, so my pings aren't the greatest. But the word from my ADSL-connected mates is that my experience isn't entirely the fault of my connection.

Here's my average gameplay session: Launch MW2. Wait for Steam to connect. Wait a little longer. Find a friend playing a game. Click join game. Wait for IWNet to connect. Attempt to join game session. Attempt #1. #2. #3... #22. #23. #24. Cannot connect to host. Try again. Server is full. Try another friend. Server is full. Try another friend. Server is also bloody full. Fine... I'll go find my own game then. Click find a game. Choose Team Deathmatch. Searching for seven more players. Testing matches: 0% - 0/19 good games. Searching, searching, searching... OMG! It found a game! Match will start in 5... 4... 3... 2... ... Disconnected from host.

Oh, bummer this! I'm playing *Plants vs. Zombies*.





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Assassin's Creed II

A regeneration of the genre

Genre→ Action Stealth

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

I AM NOT GOING TO lie about it. Despite its flaws, I was a fan of the first *Assassin's Creed*. Yes, the game got very repetitive, and the way missions were structured was a little silly. The world of Altair was interrupted far too often by the sci-fi style back-story (which saw a kidnapped bar tender, Desmond Miles, having his genetic memory probed for clues to the location of a powerful artefact in the Holy Land, in the 12th century). In fact, the game had many niggles and flaws. Still, I enjoyed it, because it had such potential... it made a promise of things to come.

With the release of *Assassin's Creed II*, that promise was realised to a large degree – and it's not just rampant fanboy gushing here. The game is getting rave reviews from all quarters, and with good reason. The development team at Ubisoft Montreal excelled with this new version of the game, making it exactly what they should have, and tying the game dynamics to the already awesome visuals more completely than in the previous version.

The game kicks off exactly where the last one ended. Desmond is still in the hands of the modern day Templars, disguised as a high-tech company called Abstergo. But that changes quickly. In fact, those who haven't played the previous game may be a little lost in the beginning of *Assassin's Creed II*. While a few hints are thrown towards what happened before, Desmond's whirlwind rescue by the Assassins may prove a little



What do you mean my penis won't be bothering me anymore?

confusing as far as facts go. The erstwhile bar tender is whisked away to the Assassins' base, where he is introduced to a new version of the Animus, the machine that allows access to his genetic memories. This initial sequence seems overly long, particularly for those who want to get to the action right away, but the trade-off is that, while more time is spent establishing the background for the story in this instalment, less time is spent outside of the Animus for the rest of the game. It's a very fair trade. Where Desmond had to leave the memories of Altair regularly in the first game, he now spends protracted periods of time in the guise of another ancestor,

Ezio Auditore, and communicates with those running the animus in the "real world" without leaving his memories. This creates a more fluid and engaging story, and a less jarring series of missions – where the story before was comprised entirely of cobbled-together memories of major events, this time around the player will get to "live" as the ancestor.

The action moves from the 12th century Holy Land to 15th century Italy. Grippled by the creative fervour of the Renaissance, the setting is vibrant and lively. The player will get to visit and explore a handful of locations, based on real-world, historical cities, just as before. But these excursions are to



places that are better realised, more believable and generally more exciting and complex than the settings of the previous title.

The character of Ezio is very different from Altair. As Altair, the player started the game as a fully-fledged, arrogant killer for hire. At the start of the second game, Ezio is little more than a carefree young man, engaging in fisticuffs and fleeing the bedrooms of pretty young girls when their fathers come knocking in his hometown of Florence. The early stages of the memories in the game (read: "playing as Ezio") are also fairly slow, but a cleverly disguised and slowly delivered tutorial keeps things interesting during these phases. Additionally, the all-important story is set up. It's a complex one, and needs a bit of establishment. Pretty soon, though Ezio finds himself on the run, his family betrayed and all the other male members executed. Ezio wants revenge, but he needs to learn how to use the skills he already has (his parkour-style climbing and rooftop-running skills are available right from the start) in ending the lives of those who have wronged his family.

To this end, Ezio is trained by his uncle, Mario (yes, they even make a Mario Brothers-related joke when he first appears) from a small town owned by the family. This town becomes Ezio's base of operation, and he becomes responsible for improving the town, too.

It's a low-grade management element to the game that allows the player to earn additional income – another new aspect to the game. The town can also be explored for various collectible items.

Back to the money thing – this is a massive addition to the game. Ezio can earn money doing various story and side-quests, as well as by upgrading his home base and pilfering it through less-than-legal means. The money earned can be spent on various things, including equipment upgrades. These upgrades, in turn, help the character: armour adds more health blocks, and different weapons offer different strengths and weaknesses. There are even several weapons in each category. Money can also be spent on healing, and buying the newly introduced health packs that Ezio carries with him. Money can even be used to dye his clothes, or to hire henchmen in the form of mercenaries, bandits or courtesans. Even travel can be resolved quickly, through the expenditure of some Florins. Some of the equipment that Ezio acquires can be upgraded, too, by none other than a young Leonardo da Vinci. The artist and inventor will also make some unique equipment available to the character, as needs demand.

Aside from the story missions (which will take around 18 hours to complete), there is a hell of a lot to do in *Assassin's Creed II*. Aside from various collectable



items, the player can also engage in side missions, ranging from delivering letters to offending people who have nothing to do with the plot. And it's all done very stylishly. Gone are the mission requirements that would have Altair running around gathering information. The story (and consequently, the missions) flows much more smoothly, and the player is less forced to do anything. The game has become a sandbox-style stealth-action title because of this. There is even some low-grade puzzle solving built in, and some Tomb Raider-style movement puzzles will allow Ezio to find some vital items.

The amount of things to do is staggering, and *Assassin's Creed II* will keep the player busy for a long time. The best is that the variety of activities is supported by a control scheme that flows beautifully. Based wholly on the contextual scheme used in the previous version of the game, the player can do a whole lot more... particularly when it comes to combat. Unlike other games that use stealth as a core dynamic, getting discovered doesn't mean that Ezio will necessarily die. He is a capable fighter (as one would expect from a highly trained operative or assassin). And this time around, he can do more in fights, including disarming opponents, assassinations from ledges and hiding places and picking up dropped weapons. Additionally, he can now swim, and can perform a number of new moves when travelling.

When it comes to the stealth elements, many improvements have been made. Ezio can hide in any crowd now, and can even rent folks (like courtesans) to provide cover. These rented workers can also cause distractions, which are handy for getting guards' attentions off the



character. Ezio can even scatter coins around, to similar effect.

The game also has a new notoriety system. Crimes and wrongdoings will get Ezio a reputation, and guards will actively look for him. But, by tearing down wanted posters, bribing town criers and offing the right officials, the player can once again become a face in the crowd.

The best thing about *Assassin's Creed II* (and there are many good things about this title) is that the developers listened to the criticisms levelled at the first game, added some more inspired ideas, and evolved the game into a very new, very exciting instalment in the franchise. The evolution between the two titles is remarkable and, if this trend continues, the third game will doubtlessly be absolutely mind-blowing.

This is a stealth game that moves away from established norms and puts all the control into the player's

hands. It is beautifully presented, both visually and in terms of the plot, and has a little something for everyone. *Assassin's Creed II* is without a doubt one of the finest games we have seen in a long time. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius



Plus
+ More freedom
+ More to do
+ Vastly improved

Minus
- Camera could be dodgy
- Some repetition

Bottom Line

A remarkable sequel, *Assassin's Creed II* evolves the franchise perfectly... this is a great game.

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Dragon Age: Origins

AKA Baldur's Nevermass Republic Fantasy

Genre→ Role-Playing game

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

WHEN BIOWARE DEVELOPS AN RPG, people pay attention. They've been at it for a little over ten years now; from their roots in the heavily D&D-based games *Baldur's Gate* and *Neverwinter Nights*, to *Knights of the Old Republic* and *Mass Effect*. Next to Black Isle, BioWare is considered one of the most creative RPG developers to grace the last decade of gaming. It makes sense, then, that *Dragon Age: Origins* would have a fair amount of hype surrounding its release: the game has been in development for at least five years and is considered to be the spiritual successor to the *Baldur's Gate* series, although it uses proprietary RPG mechanics in place of the traditional

D&D systems. It's also the first RPG that BioWare has released on the three mainstream platforms, which puts a lot of pressure on the company to produce a game as close as possible to their finest ever. The good news: they haven't slipped up. Despite a couple of small irritations here and there, *Dragon Age: Origins* is a title worthy of bearing the BioWare name, continuing the tradition of fine RPGs, and ensuring the company's continued existence under the ever-tightening grip of EA's cut-back campaign.

In *Dragon Age*, each character that you play as will have a background as rich and detailed as those found in many games. This is your "Origin," and will have an impact on you and your character throughout the entire game, but most dominantly in the opening act.





Friends like these

Dragon Age boasts some of the funniest, strangest, most interesting party members you'll ever encounter in an RPG. Each character is packed full of personality, and such strong personalities have the habit of clashing... a lot. During some of the most inopportune moments, your companions (of which there are nine, including the extra chap supplied with the free, in-box DLC) will squabble and prod each other, calling them on their religion, magic practices, histories and habits. As you progress through the story, you can also chat to your companions, unravelling the mysteries of their past and even trying your luck at a little romance. Each party member has a numerical attitude towards your character, be it approval or disapproval; this attitude affects how readily they'll talk about certain things, and might even see them leaving your merry band if you upset them enough. And they are fickle creatures. Their conflicting personalities will often clash with your own character's: there are subtle repercussions (at the very least) for almost every action your character takes in the game.



While the story will flow in whichever direction you guide it, the core line follows the path of the Grey Wardens, a group of hardened warriors from all walks of life, dedicated to the eradication of Darkspawn and ending the Blight. You don't start as a Grey Warden, but your origin determines how and why you became one.

While pretty much everything about *Dragon Age* is fantastic (we'll get to that stuff shortly), the story and the world in which it takes place are the real stars of the show. The world is full of political intrigue that will suck you in: battles for power, control or freedom; secret organisations and guilds; assassination attempts, betrayal, racial tension, slavery, poverty and the domination of the poor

Second Opinion (380)

Dragon Age is excellent, but the delivery – like its voice acting – is inconsistent. The characters you meet seem bipolar, shifting in tone and inflection from sentence to sentence, an unfortunate side effect of the conversation being governed by one's wildly varied choices.

Played from a third-person perspective on console, instead of the optional bird's-eye view on PC, the visuals pass but suffer from a lack of any real art direction. It's all functional – a house looks like a house – but it's missing flair or character. The main quest line will take you twenty hours, increased up to fifty if you go for side quests. Post-game, you can still wander around and play through DLC or finish up some quests you missed. Much can happen in a single conversation, so a single play-through will barely show you half what the game has to offer in terms of content.

Combat is primarily dictated by the Tactics system: you rarely need to pause (by bringing up the radial menu) to issue specific orders, though you can swap between characters rapidly and give exact commands if needed.

There is a lot of action, even more talking and plenty of plot to wade through. On console, at least, *Dragon Age: Origins* is an uncontested, unprecedented western RPG – if you like them in meat-and-potatoes fantasy flavour.

Miktar Dracon



A fighting chance

Combat is always an important part of an RPG, and *Dragon Age* is no exception to this rule. Combat is handled through a simultaneous turn-based system that's been dressed up in a real-time frock. Additionally, you have the option to pause combat at any time, issue orders to your various companions and get back to the action with a press of the spacebar. But when things really start getting crazy, it'll take more than manual orders to get the job done. This is where the Tactics system comes in. Similar to the Gambit system found in *Final Fantasy XII*, Tactics allow you to program various actions into your character's and companion's combat AI. You can choose from a number of conditions (there really are quite a few), and choose for that character to perform a particular action, such as changing stance, weapons, casting spells or downing a potion. While it's a great system, and suffices for most occasions, there are some moments when I'd prefer to have an extra layer of control, such as If-then-else conditions, or multiple conditions for certain actions. It's better than what most other RPGs offer, though, so it's tough to really find fault.



– *Dragon Age* has it all. Characters will have to use their brains as often as their swords if they have any hope to succeed, as dialogue with almost every NPC in the game is laden with subterfuge, coercion and intimidation, and even flirtation and ulterior motives of the romantic kind. Every line of dialogue is delivered through mostly excellent voice acting. Unfortunately, the dialogue does tend to feel a little too direct at times: a hardened band of mercenaries who are giving the local barkeep a hard time will pack up their things on your request as readily as they'll bare steel, based purely on a single choice from the conversation tree. It's not terrible, and seems to largely be limited to side quests and those of little consequence, but it does rudely shunt one back into the reality that conversations of this sort are governed by skill points and dice rolls.

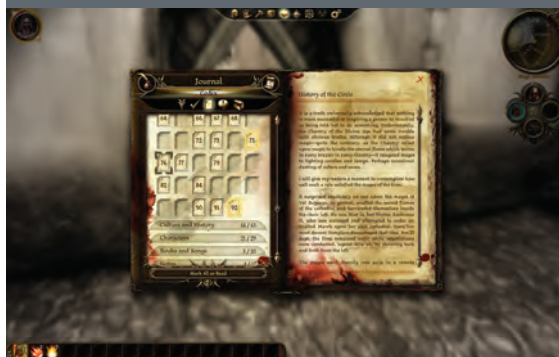
When you're not busying yourself with the core storyline, there is plenty to see and do in the lands of Thedas (originally a bit of a joke, it stands for **The Dragon Age Setting**). There are thriving capital

cities, pitiful refugee camps, deadly forests and aging ruins – every part of which is incredibly detailed, especially the architecture within cities. There are plenty of optional side quests to busy yourself with that plump up the expected game length to a generous 80 hours, but it's estimated that you can skim through the central storyline closer to the 50-hour mark. Throughout the game world, you'll find various guilds and groups with small tasks awaiting a brave adventurer and his/her three other party members, in addition to the odd jobs that NPCs will offer you. These range from tasks for the local underground mage's guild – The Collective – to the delicately termed Favours for Certain Interested Parties – in other words, the thieves' guild. As you progress through the core storyline, additional side quests will open up, ensuring you're never bored. It's easy to get to a stage where you've got too much on your plate, but the optional nature of side quests also ensures that you're only as busy as you'd like to be. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

Stay on top of things

The depth of RPGs often means that keeping track of everything in the world can become a bit of a chore. Quests, NPCs, locations, organisations – these things are all important parts of the world of *Dragon Age*, and BioWare wants to ensure that you don't lose track of anything. To deal with this, you have The Codex – a centralised place for all the interesting facts you pick up during your travels. Codex entries are added automatically when your character is given sufficient information about something significant, but can also be found hidden throughout the game world. If ever you forget why it is that you should care about the task at hand (hey, it's a big game), simply pop into the Codex screen, take a gander at the relevant text and be on your way. Or, if you've got some time to kill, reading through a full Codex is a fine way to waste a couple of hours.



The Score



Plus

- + Fantastic story
- + Rich and deep world
- + Excellent characters

Minus

- Nothing worth concerning yourself with

Bottom Line

It might have a couple of issues, but *Dragon Age* should appeal to just about every RPG gamer out there. It really is that good.

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90

MASS EFFECT 2

ASSEMBLE YOUR TEAM FIGHT FOR THE LOST

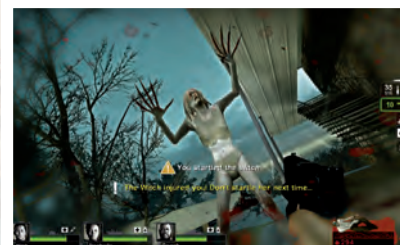
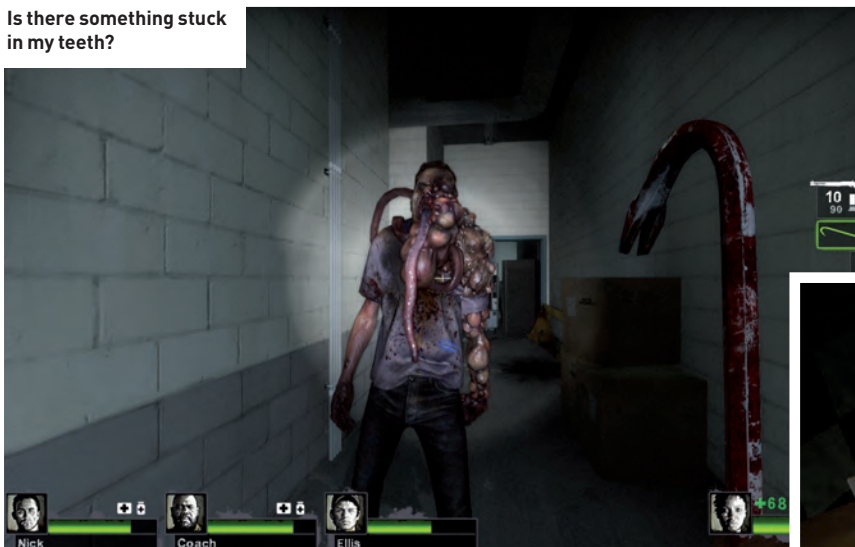
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Is there something stuck
in my teeth?



Left 4 Dead 2

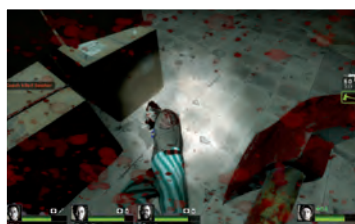
Limber up

Genre→ First-Person Shooter

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

LEFT 4 DEAD WAS a bit of a surprise. Despite its repetitive gameplay, limited weapons and enemies, and technically unimpressive visuals, the game turned out to be one of the most addictive, exciting, and excessively violent games of 2008. What it lacked in content, it made up for with sheer fun. At its heart, it was a great game, but many were left feeling that it could have accomplished so much more. That's the keyword with *Left 4 Dead 2*: "more." Some fans are still grumbling that the content from *L4D2* could've simply been added to the first title in the form of DLC, and Valve is still stalwartly sticking to its guns that it just wouldn't work.

This time around, you follow the just-strong-enough-to-hold-things-together story of four unlikely (and initially, unfriendly) Survivors who chose to stick together for the sake of not dying - smart. The game takes place over five chapters (one more than *L4D*), but each is a little shorter than previously. It makes for around four hours of total playtime at a moderate pace. The same basic gameplay system from *L4D* is in place: kill Infected, pick up weapons and other useful items, stick together, and keep each other alive. There are a number of new and exciting weapons to use against the endless undead: a Magnum, three shotguns, a silenced machine gun, two assault rifles, and a sniper rifle. There's also a grenade launcher and the long-overdue addition of melee weapons. From electric guitars to frying pans to chainsaws (oh, yeah), Valve has gone out of their way to make up for the silly lack of these zombie-apocalypse



necessities. There are also a few weapon upgrades in the form of limited-use incendiary and explosive rounds, as well as a laser sight for increased accuracy.

While the progression through the campaigns follows much the same pattern as *L4D*, there are a number of significant additions to the everyday chaos to liven things up. The sadistic AI Director is back and more ruthless than ever. This time, the levels can be altered at certain places - doors simply won't be there or gravestones will have shifted around since you last played,

The new Special Infected

JOCKEY

Think of this little fellow as everything that annoys you about the Smoker and the Hunter, rolled into one. He'll pounce onto the nearest survivor and ride that sucker around, often off ledges, out of windows and into the bilious projectile of a boomer. If you see one of these, unload everything you have at it.

SPITTER

When trailer trash meets the depths of hell, you get the Spitter. With some of the worst acid reflux this side of the Mississippi, she'll project a stream of corrosive acid at anyone unfortunate enough to cross her path. She doesn't take much to bring down, but even that leaves a pool of noxious juices around that you're better off not stepping in.

CHARGER

Big, ugly, dumb, and coming at you as fast as a speeding train. He probably weighs about the same as one too. With his oversized arm and Dungaears of Movement +1, this fella might've been a good lad before, but in his infected state, he wants nothing more than to pound your head into the concrete.

WITCH

She's not new, but this time she's often not content to just sit around on inconvenient staircases waiting for you to stumble by and upset her wailing. The roaming Witch staggers around randomly, and is as tough as ever to bring down. In Realism mode, she'll tear you to pieces in a single swipe. Be careful.

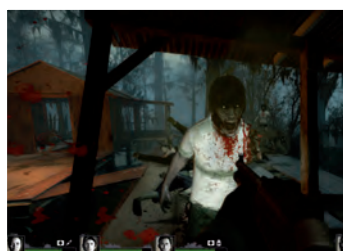
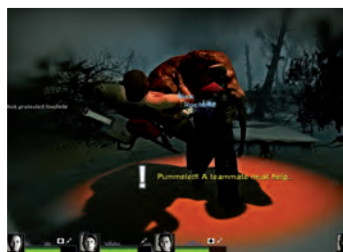
Zombies don't care if it's night or day. Limit your excursions to daytime. In fact, don't have any excursions. This is a zombie attack, not a visit to Disneyland, you dumbass.



Side orders

When you're done with the regular campaign (ideally played with friends; the party AI is about as useful as a toothless saw), there are a few new game modes for you to join in. Versus has been expanded to include Scavenge mode, which requires Survivors to collect cans of gasoline scattered around an enclosed level to power a generator or fuel up a car. As with Versus, up to four players can play as the Infected, and must try to kill all the Survivors before they accomplish their goal.

The game also includes Realism mode, which is the regular campaign with a handful of extra difficulty. Infected have many more hit points, and can only be brought down quickly with a headshot. Additionally, all item and Survivor glows are disabled, making it important to know where everyone and everything is at any given time. While this mode is certainly harder than the Regular mode, it's not *that* difficult, and is highly recommended for those looking for a good challenge.



never allowing players to fall into the lull of safe routine. As one would expect, there are new Special Infected, and there's also a new class of foe that falls between the Special and Common. Each chapter has its own, including Dark Carnival's squeaky-shoed clown (those shoes drive the Common Infected nuts) and Hard Rain's construction workers with their melee-resistant hard hats and noise-preventing earplugs. It forces you to adapt your strategies on the fly, more so than ever before. No longer is there a safe strategy for dealing with a Tank, or a Witch, because you'll often have to face numerous Uncommon Infected at once, with a Special (or two... or three) thrown in for extra fun.

One of the most important changes in the level design is the addition of Crescendo Events during the chapter itself, instead of just the usual business at the end. These events come in a few flavours, much like everything in the game, including a few (potentially never-ending) occasions where you need to disable an alarm that's somewhere far away and uncannily prone to alerting a million nearby Infected.

Valve's trusty Source engine might be showing further signs of ageing, but

the developers haven't let go just yet. Everything seems to have been given the visual once-over, or at least the impression of such with liberal use of motion blur. The game's arcade-like feel lends itself perfectly to this style of play. What this means is that those looking for "Hardcore Super Action Shooter 5" will be disappointed, but at least temporarily amused, nonetheless. Those looking for what *Left 4 Dead* should have been all along: you've come to the right place. **NAG**

Geoff Burrows

The Score

1	2-8	2-4	18
www.pegi.info			

Plus

- + Intense action
- + Tons of content
- + Addictive gameplay

Minus

- Ageing visuals
- Painful Survivor AI

Bottom Line

This is what *Left 4 Dead* should have been.

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Future Games



Spank me, I've been a bad boy!



WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2010

It's not fake; it's just not that real...

Genre→ Sport

PC 360 **PS3** Wii PS2 PSP DS

THERE'S LITTLE DOUBT THAT the *WWE SmackDown vs. Raw* series has earned its spot as the pre-eminent name in wrestling games – it's enjoyed nine years of annual releases, with each instalment as eagerly awaited by fans as the last. From a critic's point of view, things aren't quite that simple: for every innovation introduced over the years, THQ has made as many mistakes, resulting in releases that were at best somewhat flawed, and at worst horribly disappointing. 2010 seems to be another good year for THQ, as this year's release builds on last year's new features, while also offering new opportunities for the creation and distribution of user-made content. That's not to say that the game is without its faults. It's far from perfect, and, sadly, many of its flaws are also carried over from previous iterations. Nevertheless, it is a positive step for the series.

One of the immediately striking changes is that the menu screen has been replaced with the "Training Facility" – a practice ground in the same vein as *FIFA's* "Arena." It basically pits you against a dummy opponent, while giving you tips on how to play the game. From there, the start button brings up the actual menu, from which you can choose to manage existing superstars, create new ones, or enter into any of the various kinds of matches and career paths on offer.

Character creation has long been an important component of the *SVR* series, though this is where *SVR 2010* makes one of its first mistakes. In a bid to make created characters look more realistic, all available clothing items are no longer



flat objects but new three-dimensional models, and they certainly add a new level of realism to home-made characters. The downside to this, however, is that the game now imposes a limitation on how detailed your character can be – you're allowed a maximum of 48 "creation points", and once these are exceeded, you'll have to start deleting items before you can add any new ones. Unfortunately, some of the more complex jackets and hairstyles seem to consume an inordinately large number of points, making it a challenge to create characters without exceeding this frustrating limit.

Fans of the series will be pleased to note that the Highlight Reel feature, which allows players to edit together clips of their favourite portions of a match in order to share online, makes its return. Editing clips is, sadly, just as tedious and time-consuming as it's ever been, but seamless YouTube integration means

that once you've gone to the trouble of editing your clips, sharing them has never been easier. *SVR 2010* even goes another step further, finally allowing you to use Highlight Reel footage to customise the entrance videos for your characters – a feature that's been noticeably lacking in the series before now.

The wrestling itself sees only minor changes from last year's iteration. The basic grappling system is still mapped to the right analogue stick as in the past, though there are some new context-sensitive controls thrown in. For example, in a submission-only match, some of your character's regular attacks are replaced by additional submission moves, making it easier to win via a tap-out. You can now also perform different attacks on a downed opponent by grappling near different body parts. The Royal Rumble match also sees a significant control overhaul, which employs some new



Too much chicken and not enough beef



mini-games that require precise timing in order to throw opponents out of the ring. Wrestlers also have access to new Royal Rumble finishers that can instantly eliminate opponents, provided they've built up enough momentum to pull those moves off. *SVR 2010* also introduces a few new match types, including Championship Scramble, where a number of superstars vie for a single title in a timed match, a Mixed Tag match, and a revamped Backstage match. It's nothing spectacularly new, but worth mentioning, nonetheless.

Perhaps the most important addition to *SVR 2010* is the Story Designer that lets you put together your own storylines, allowing you to book matches and script cut-scenes to create whatever scenarios you can imagine. And if the creation process is too laborious, you can quickly and easily download other players' creations (storylines and characters) from the *SVR 2010* servers – it's the kind of *LittleBigPlanet*-esque connectivity that WWE fans have been waiting for, and it adds greatly to the game's longevity.

Alas, *SVR 2010* still comes up lacking in some key areas. The load times that have always plagued the character creator are

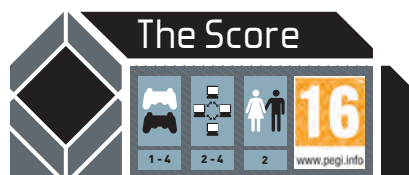
still present and annoying, and there's no shortage of clipping errors in the otherwise impressive visuals. It's nearly ten years since the initial release, and we're still seeing characters magically warp around the ring when the animation sequences for certain moves are initiated – for a game that strives so hard to be true to life, these are issues that the developers should have smoothed out a while ago already.

The commentary, too, remains a mixed bag. Although Raw's Jim Ross and the King do a fair job of maintaining excitement, the other brands' commentators are dull, lifeless and stilted. There's a definitive paucity of recorded names for created characters, which means you'll probably be forced to pick something generic for your character to be addressed by. This is particularly disappointing compared with a game like *Fight Night Round 4*, which tackles the same problem in a much better way.

Matches with multiple characters in the ring at once are still more trouble than they're worth, given the clumsiness of the targeting system. And despite how well designed the characters are, the animations are still stilted and lacking

the near real-life fluidity that other sports titles display. Nonetheless, THQ has made some significant improvements with *SVR 2010*, and has done well to expand the scope of the game with the incorporation of the story designer and online communities. There's no doubt that this is the best *SVR* game so far. Let's just hope that with next year's instalment, more attention is paid to addressing some of the series' long-standing flaws. **NAG**

Adam Lieberman



Plus
+ Story designer mode
+ Improved controls
+ Downloadable content

Minus
- Limited creation options
- Visual and audio flaws

Bottom Line

WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2010 builds on the series' strong points, adding great new touches like the story designer and online community.

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FUEL THE PASSION





DJ Hero

Is being a guitar hero in your rock band not your thing?

Genre→ Music

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

A SIDE: THE DJ HERO GAME

THIS IS THE STORY of the world's most honest rhythm game. With the exception of the simulated drum kits in *Rock Band* and *Guitar Hero World Tour*, music games have remained relatively dishonest about how much like the real thing their play mechanics are. It's all artfully orchestrated to make you feel real; and that's not a criticism. That's what all videogames do, in their own way, to their own degree.

Take These Broken Wings

What a traditional DJ does is to take someone else's content and create a unique performance by presenting it in a new way. The mechanics of *DJ Hero* are, by providence and design, far closer to what a real DJ uses in his art from a pure play mechanic point of view. But metaphorically, the process of mixing and mashing is much closer to what a player does in a game than what *Guitar Hero* is to actually being Van Halen.

Perhaps because it's more honest about and closer to the activity it represents. The gameplay concepts feel

more relevant – less fake, less arbitrary. There's an intensity in playing *DJ Hero* that arguably goes beyond the plastic guitar games in terms of the euphoria and sense of "being there."

Hear the Voices Sing

But that's the thing about music games. At the centre, they're only as good as the music they offer. In *DJ Hero*, you're not playing along to a collection of popular and classic music that you already know and love: here you are presented with a whopping 93 new, original works that you've never heard before this game came into existence. Compared to the stately, cautious reverence that rock-orientated games display towards their meticulously converted and presented songs, mash-ups throw dignity to the wind. They're sarcastic. Playful. Satirical. Wildly inventive.

Learn To Fly

By nature, this is a single player-focused experience, clashing with the heavy multiplayer emphasis in all recent rhythm games. The progression is basic and addictive, with stars earned from performances unlocking new songs, venues, set lists, and characters. In a couple of unusual choices for the genre, however, FreeStyleGames has forgone

any kind of fail-state when playing, and made difficulty selection irrelevant to your campaign progression. No more stars are earned by beating a song on Expert than on Easy. This twist does invite the player to be daring, rather than being terrified that Expert won't even allow one to get some practice in on the song.

Learn To Live So Free

Multiplayer in the game is limited to twin-DJ duels over Xbox LIVE or locally, and a smattering of songs, which allows a guitar controller to be used for the guitar track. One feature that has become critical to the music game is missing: a real music store.

What this all comes down to is that *DJ Hero* is, in a quickly reddening sea of guitar rock games, a small, green island (that's full of turntables). Sheer genre fatigue may cause some people to turn away purely because of the "-Hero" in the name and the price tag attached to the elaborate turntable. If you love music, however, you might want to think hard about this: the content that counts the most, the tunes, are absolutely unrivalled and the playing experience is unique.

B SIDE: THE DJ HERO TURNTABLE

If you didn't get to see or try *DJ Hero* for yourself at this year's rAge, here's the



detailed lowdown on what you're paying all that money for, game aside.

Specifics

Remarkably sturdy, the turntable is about 37cm by 23cm, standing 4cm high. It consists of two parts: the black effects panel, and the silver record panel. On the back of the record panel is a latch, which releases the effects panel for smaller storage. Large rubber feet on the bottom of the record panel, and smaller ones under the effects panel, keep the entire thing from sliding around.

Effects Panel

In the middle of the panel is a cross-fade slider, and above that is an effects dial. The matte-surfaced Euphoria button is adjacent to the effects dial, and right at the top hides a small flip-open compartment that covers the regular Xbox controller directional pad, guide button and standard gamepad buttons. The cross-fader has a lot of play, presumably to accommodate larger hands or more voracious DJ "styles." The slider only needs to be tweaked slightly left and right for the game to accept it, so some people will use minimalistic motions while others can happily slap it to the sides if they want to flourish. To mark "centre," the slider has a small click when

it's right in the middle. The effects dial rotates freely, and the Euphoria button lights up red when you have available Euphoria. The standard gamepad buttons are useful, since navigating the in-game menus with the slider and effects knob is possible, but not ideal.

Record Panel

The "record" with its three colour-coded buttons and mirror-studded edge has a diameter of 21cm and spins freely. The three colour-coded buttons on the record are concave with a texture to them to prevent slipping (though using a thumb on the studded perimeter of the record helps most with that when doing scratches, especially ones involving the blue button), while the record surface itself is corrugated with grooves – like an actual record.

Verdict

The construction of the turntable is solid, with zero creaking even if you press down harder than you should on the record or buttons. The only part that feels slightly "cheap" is the cross-fader, which is clearly designed to withstand an abusive gamer, but suffers for it in the tactile sense by feeling very loose. It's not an issue when you're playing, though. So, is this additional hunk of plastic invading

your living space worth the asking price of the game?

The honest answer: not entirely. It's going to take some metal construction and a bit more design work to make the peripheral feel worth the price tag; though, obviously, this would pose a weight issue when shipping the game, which would raise the price all over again. The realistic answer: just like *Guitar Hero* and *Rock Band*, you already know if you're going to pay the money for what the game has to offer, either because you tried it somewhere and liked it, or because it's just "your thing." **NAG**

Miktar Dracon

The Score

1-2	2	2	3
www.pegi.info			

Plus

- + Fresh experience
- + Challenging gameplay
- + Large music selection

Minus

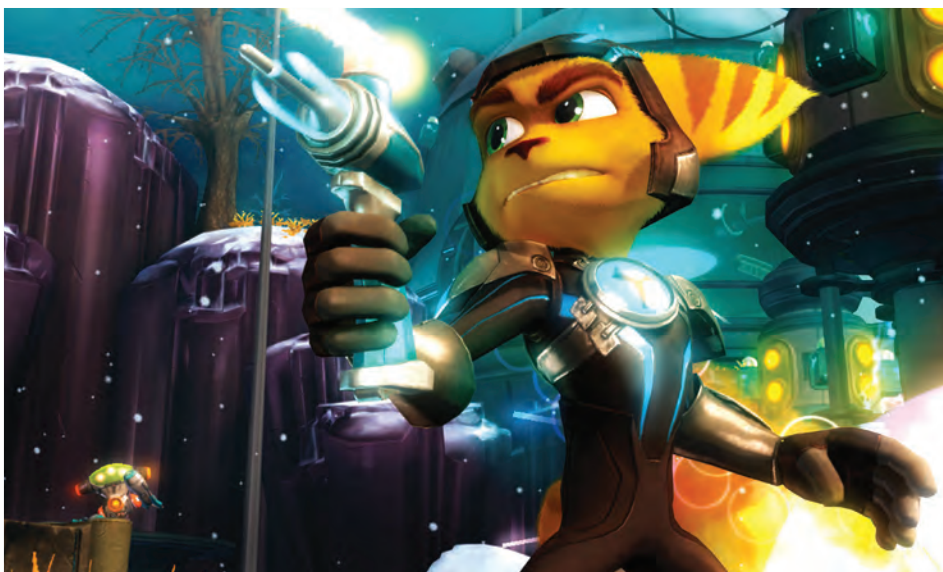
- Expensive
- Some songs overused
- Niche appeal

Bottom Line

It's not *Guitar Hero*, and that's a good thing. How much of a good thing is up to you.

AVAILABLE AT
Look & Listen
FOOTLOCKERS





Ratchet & Clank: A Crack in Time

More of the same has never been so good

Genre→ Action/Platformer

PC 360 **PS3** Wii PS2 PSP DS

PICKING UP WHERE THE bite-sized *Quest for Booty* left off, *A Crack in Time* is the latest title in Insomniac Games' renowned *Ratchet & Clank* series, and it marks the conclusion of the PS3-exclusive "Future" trilogy. For those who aren't up to speed with the story, Ratchet, the furry yet decidedly deadly Lombax, is still searching for his diminutive accomplice Clank, who has been missing since his abduction at the hands of the mysterious Zoni in *Tools of Destruction*. Making return appearances are the crazed robotic scientist, Dr Nefarious, and the publicity-hungry but always entertaining Captain Qwark. As has become the hallmark of the series, the cut-scenes in *A Crack in Time* are every bit as entertaining and humorous as fans have come to expect.

As for the game itself, you'll spend your time alternating between playing as the trigger-happy Ratchet and the more cerebral Clank. The Ratchet levels stay true to the series' tried-and-tested formula, featuring standard platform sequences, the occasional puzzle, and a generous helping of enemies to shoot at using a variety of offbeat, customisable weaponry. As usual, defeating foes allows you to level your weapons up, while collecting the ubiquitous bolts that are scattered throughout each area allows you to buy new weapons as they become available. These segments will certainly feel very familiar to anyone who's experienced *Ratchet & Clank* before, but that's not necessarily a bad thing, as the

series is known for providing some of the most enjoyable platforming action available.

Of course, *A Crack in Time* does bring with it some innovative changes, too. Early in the game, Clank gains access to a weapon that allows him some control over the flow of time, which allows him to effectively "record" actions that are then carried out by different versions of himself. For example, you might have to instruct one of the past-Clanks to hold down a switch, while present-Clank runs through the door that it operates. In addition to these clever time-based puzzles, *A Crack in Time* also gives you control over Ratchet's spaceship between levels, allowing you to engage in some two-dimensional dog fighting. You could also land on a number of "moons," which aren't central to your main mission, but allows you to undertake a number of side-quests in exchange for a variety of rewards.

Presentation has always been one of the series' strong points, and *A Crack in Time* is no exception - gorgeous visuals are the order of the day all around. Insomniac Games has truly done an impressive job in balancing the familiar "platform and shooting" formula that the *Ratchet & Clank* franchise is known for with a mix of innovative and engaging concepts, all the while wrapping the whole thing up in a very slickly produced package. *A Crack in Time* isn't vastly different to its predecessors, but it doesn't need to be - this is about as close to platform perfection as the PS3 has come, and it's a title that's not to be missed. **NAG**

Adam Liebman

No, R2D2 is just someone my sister was banging



The Score

1	NA	NA	www.pegi.info	

Plus
 + Excellent time puzzles
 + Unique weaponry
 + No shortage of laughs


Minus
 - Nothing too different

Bottom Line

A Crack in Time is *Ratchet & Clank*'s best outing so far, combining jump-and-gun action with clever new puzzle sequences. It's a keeper!

AVAILABLE AT
 Look & Listen
 For the Fans

86



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www.eset.co.za



Dead in Space

It's bizarre that Electronic Arts sent this out to die, releasing the game with practically zero fanfare or advertising. Granted, thus far "mature" games have done poorly on the Wii, so EA's trepidation is not unwarranted. Still, it feels like they're using this as a scapegoat to avoid developing mature games for the Wii in the future, citing *Extraction's* poor sales as "proof" that mature games don't sell on the Wii. No, EA, bad games don't sell on the Wii, and games that get no backing from a publisher don't do well either.



Dead Space: Extraction

In space, nobody can hear your gasps of amazement...

Genre→ First-Person Shooter

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

MORE FRIGHTENING THAN THE woman's face on the cover of the game box, is that *Dead Space: Extraction* is actually rather good. Or, if you happen to love your first-person shooting on rails, then you could say *Extraction* is very good. If you love *Dead Space*, on-rails shooters and the Wii, then *Extraction* is downright amazing. And if you love watching cut-scenes, then *Extraction* will send you into a coma from sheer awesome. Visceral Games has managed to make one of the finest games of this particular (and underwhelmed) genre, and even made it the kind of tie-in game a franchise usually only dreams of. Set as a prequel to the events in *Dead Space* (literally moments before the mysterious Red Marker is extracted from the far-flung colony of Aegis VII - fans know what happens next) and during the same time as the *Dead Space: Downfall* animated film, *Extraction* plays out like a giant cut-scene where you can shoot things. The game retroactively explains lots of little things you come across in *Dead Space*, which is really kind of neat when you notice it: certain makeshift barriers, a specific garbled message and other things we'd rather not spoil. As an on-rails shooter, the controls work. The Wiimote aims and shoots, while twisting the Wiimote sideways engages secondary fire mode on the weapons. The Nunchuck is used for melee attacks and weapon swap (during co-op, player two only needs to use a single Wiimote, but can use a Nunchuck too). During drop-in/



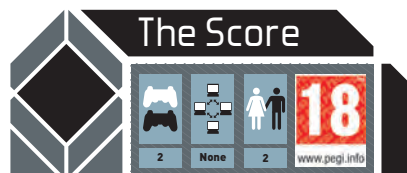
Just don't "Wii" in your pants

drop-out cooperative play, special events like puzzles are adjusted so that both players need to take part. A good example of this is one scene where you have to hack a panel by dragging the cursor down a path while still shooting aliens - the players take turns dragging and shooting. There are the occasional short breaks in levels where the player can look around and grab ammunition (since it's not infinite), audio logs (that play over the Wiimote speaker) or choose which path to take when it branches. Every level has a few branch-points, which makes replaying them interesting if you're the type who tries to get the five-star rating for a level. Completing a level unlocks Challenge Mode levels, which are high-score runs through specially designed stages filled with many things trying to kill you. It's a simple, straightforward game and premise, filled with lots of content, great touches, a few good scares and

great cooperative action - if you like that kind of thing. It also has the option to lower the amount of camera shake - a must if you get motion sick from shaky-cam-style presentations.

NAG
Miktar Dragon

The Score



Plus

- + Faithful to the franchise
- + Lots of thrills

Minus

- It's on the Wii
- Could make you motion sick

Bottom Line

It's such a great game really, but on the wrong platform to be a success.

AVAILABLE AT
Look & Listen
FOR THE FANS

84

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TOP 3

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BLOCK BREAKER
DELUXE 2



PLATINUM
SOLITAIRE 2



ACTION

SPIDERMAN



SONIC



TERMINATOR



GIRLS

DIAMOND TWISTER



NEW YORK
NIGHTS 2



DATE OR DITCH



SPORTS

PRO GOLF 2010



FERRARI



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Need for Speed: Nitro

At last, one meant for the Wii

Genre→ Racing

PC 360 PS3 **Wii** PS2 PSP DS

THE *NEED FOR SPEED* franchise has been shaken up this year, with a "reboot" in the form of *Shift* creating a more serious, intense racing experience for those who prefer their simulated racing action a little more visceral. The second shakeup comes in the form of a "sub-franchise" being released – a split from the usual "one game across all platforms" approach that we saw in the past. This new line is meant for more casual racers and, because of this, has been made for the ultimate casual gamer console: Nintendo's Wii.

Need for Speed: Nitro is the first *Need for Speed* game designed specifically for the Wii. It plays towards a friendlier, more arcade-style experience and, for the most part, succeeds. However, the title does need some work: there are a few elements that need to be trimmed and tweaked for the inevitable sequel.

Nitro moves away from realism in a number of ways. The cars are claimed to be recreations of real-world vehicles (30 in total), but their conversion for the game has been done with a little licence. They look like they should, for the most part, but a healthy dash of imagination was included. The impression of speed in the game is intense, and largely exaggerated for effect. And the physics... well, they're just a little off at times, particularly during drifting events.

The biggest problem facing the title

is the camera. The viewpoint is locked to a standard "above-and-behind" configuration, but the camera just doesn't keep up at times. You'll find yourself having accidents with traffic you never saw coming, and when drag racing, things just get worse. A nitro boost during a drag race (pretty much essential for victory) will pull the camera in low and close to the back of the car, leaving the player to steer more or less on instinct.

Additionally, the lack of online play limits the multiplayer somewhat, although the LAN-gaming option isn't too bad.

Other aspects of the game are great fun. The customisation of the vehicles is fun and extremely easy to do. The controls are simple enough, and a variety of schemes and controller support means that everyone should be able to find their favourite play style. And the action is intense, with the reintroduction of cops (very much along the lines of *Hot Pursuit 2*). Players knocked out of races can even take on the role of cops, which is great fun.

This game feels a little anachronistic in its theme and approach, but it is still good fun. There are numerous niggles with it, yes, but as a first attempt, it's a decent one, and one that promises good stuff in the future (if the developers take the right approach, of course).

Need for Speed: Nitro is fun, and not to be taken seriously at all. If approached in the right spirit, it will prove to be an enjoyable title for Wii racing fans. **NAG**

– Walt Pretorius



The Score



Plus

- + Easy customisation
- + Cops!

Minus

- Nasty camera
- Drifting is nasty

AVAILABLE AT
Look & Listen
For the Fans

Bottom Line

As a first attempt, *Nitro* is not bad at all, and promises good things for the inevitable sequel.

70

Developer→ Terminal Reality | Threewave Software Publisher→ Atari Distributor→ Megarom Web→ www.ghostbustersgame.com

Ghostbusters: The Video Game

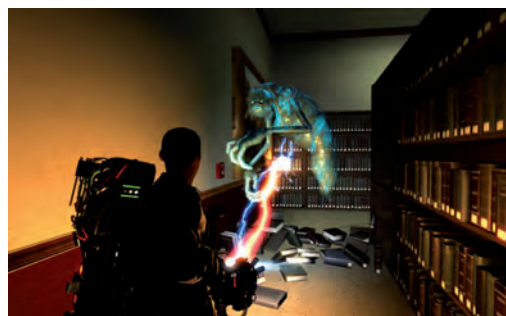
Now, finally on Xbox 360

Genre→ Action

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

IT'S 1991. TWO YEARS have passed since the events in *Ghostbusters II*. The world is still recovering from the '80s, and Vanilla Ice is at the peak of his career. The Ghostbusters have finally wriggled their way into Mayor Mulligan's good books, and, more importantly, have convinced the city that paranormal experts are a necessity on the city payroll. You play as a voiceless new member of the team, with the titles of "Experimental Equipment Technician," "new guy," and "hey you, the meat shield," lovingly bestowed upon you by Venkman, Ray, Spengler and Winston.

As the EET, it's your job to try out all the strange new devices that Egon has cooked up. What this boils down to is an assortment of weapons (and occasionally puzzle-solving devices) that are used to capture, trap, slow down and otherwise obliterate the large variety of undead you're bound to face. Each piece of equipment that you unlock during story progression can be upgraded, using cash rewards for ghost captures and terminations, to enhance their damage,



reduce power drain on the Proton Pack or increase range. The result of this perpetual cycle of unlocks, upgrades and varying foes with specific weaknesses means that the action never has a chance to grow dull. To aid in that regard, the environments are incredibly interesting and even fairly spooky at times, and are mixed together in an engaging story that's sure to appeal to *Ghostbusters* fans. Those who somehow missed out on the *Ghostbusters* films (shame on you!) might not appreciate every poke and jape that the boys regularly throw around, but the action itself is entertaining enough on its own to keep anyone interested. If you're a fan of the series, you owe it to yourself to play this game. For everyone else, it's

a fun, funny and pleasantly deep game that's sure to keep you entertained for its seven-or-so hours of game time. **NAG**
Geoff Burrows



AVAILABLE AT
Look & Listen
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audio experience

Bottom Line

Let's go, Ghostbusters! [Is this all you got? Ed]

(84)

Developer→ Studio Liverpool Publisher→ SCEE Distributor→ Ster-Kinekor Entertainment Web→ www.wipeouthd.com

WipeOut HD Fury

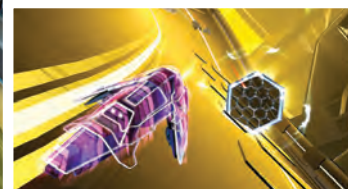
Generous speed and violence... in glorious HD

Genre→ Racing

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

THE WIPEOUT SERIES, WHICH has long been synonymous with futuristic, fast-paced arcade-style racing on the PlayStation, made its PS3 debut in the guise of the downloadable *WipeOut HD*. Fortunately for fans of Sony's flagship anti-gravity racer, *WipeOut HD* is now available in an on-the-shelf retail version, and it comes bundled with the game's much lauded expansion pack, *Fury*.

Since its original release in 1995, the *WipeOut* series has graced all of Sony's consoles, including the PSP. The game's jump to high definition was welcomed; not just for its recreation of the breakneck action that made the original a hit, but also for the way it showed off the technological prowess of the PS3, running at an unshakeable 60 frames per second in glorious 1080p resolution. *WipeOut HD* is essentially a mash-up of the strongest elements from the PSP titles, *WipeOut Pulse* and *Pure*, offering eight tracks and five different game modes, including straightforward races and time trials, as well as the more



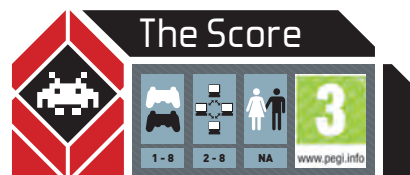
interesting Zone mode, in which you pilot your ever-accelerating craft through progressively trickier sections of track.

The *Fury* expansion, which is selectable from the main menu, adds a further eight tracks and three new race types: Eliminator, where the goal is to accumulate points by damaging your opponents' ships; Zone Battle, which adds a competitive edge to the original Zone mode; and Detonator, which sprinkles the track full of bombs and mines and gives you only a 15-shot gun to clear them with as you frantically race around the track.

With its gorgeous visuals and lengthy single-player campaigns (in total, more than 160 events to clear), as well as online

support for up to eight players, there's little not to like about *WipeOut HD Fury*. It's incredibly fast, entertaining and a pleasure to look at. **NAG**

Adam Lieberman



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Bottom Line

Fury combines all the best of the PSP releases with some deft new touches to make a lightning-fast racer that won't disappoint.

(88)



Synchronised dancing and big explosions – both are fairly common in Liberty City.

Grand Theft Auto: Episodes From Liberty City

Full-frontal male nudity has officially invaded the world of videogames

Genre→ Sandbox Action Adventure

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

IF YOU'RE READING THIS review, I'm going to assume that you've spent some time with *Grand Theft Auto IV*. Here's the deal: since *GTA IV*'s release in April 2008, Rockstar has released two DLC packs for the game (exclusive to the Xbox 360 for the time being), namely *The Lost and Damned* and *The Ballad of Gay Tony*. Both of these DLC packs are available on Xbox LIVE for 1,600 Microsoft Points (\$19.99) each. What *Episodes From Liberty City* does is to bring these DLC packs together in one convenient location (which is shaped sort of like a disc – funny that) for anyone who doesn't have access to Xbox LIVE. While it costs a bit more than if you bought the DLC directly from Xbox LIVE, it does save you on bandwidth and it comes packaged with three exclusive new radio stations for the game. Each of the episodes returns players to an updated version of the Liberty City that we visited in *GTA IV*. Each episode is almost as long (in terms of total game time) as the vanilla game was, adding new playable characters, new multiplayer modes, new weapons, new vehicles and basically just new awesome. But enough of this explanation – let's get down to dissecting this compilation.

LOST - AND NEVER FOUND

The Lost and Damned strips *GTA IV*'s gameplay down to its skivvies. It's all about lots of action with very little of the relationship building and sucking up to friends that *GTA IV* is filled with (although it does add a few new activities, like arm wrestling and biker-gang wars). Niko Belic is dropped in favour of Johnny Klebitz, a biker seemingly trapped in the '60s and a member of The Lost Motorcycle Club. Being a member of The Lost MC grants you access to a bunch of coolness, like taking advantage of Johnny's standing



in the club to call up another member and having a bike of your choice delivered to you. Playing as a biker naturally means that you'll be spending much of your time in *TLaD* screaming around on the two-wheeled death traps of Liberty City, and it's a nice change of pace. Cars can still be commandeered, but good, old American choppers (Johnny doesn't take kindly to motorcycles made by foreign manufacturers) are definitely the stars of the show here. Driving in formation happens a lot when you're out with your biker buddies, probably because it looks cool. *TLaD* is a nice variation on its parent title's game mechanics with its focus more on action-filled missions and less on gameplay distractions.

GAY BALLADS

The Ballad of Gay Tony, on the other hand, adds to the distraction, but brings with it a massive dollop of gamer-grade brilliance. Johnny is dropped this time to make way for Luis Fernando Lopez, personal bodyguard of Anthony "Gay Tony" Prince, a prominent figure in Liberty City's party/nightclub scene. While *TLaD* is grungier and dwells in the grittier side of Liberty City, *TBoGT* thrives on Liberty City's nightlife. It's all about glamorous lifestyles, glitzy nightclubs and obscene amounts of disposable cash. Like *TLaD*, it adds

a bunch of activities (like a dancing mini-game), vehicles and weapons that make Liberty City even crazier than it was before.

THE DAMNED BALLAD OF LOST TONY

Together, these episodes make for great value. They're filled with the same high production values, phenomenal voice acting, ridiculous set pieces and absurd action that made *GTA IV* such an incredible game – but this time, there are more toys to play with. Get *Episodes From Liberty City* – it's well worth the cash. **NAG**

Dane Remendes

The Score

1

2-16

2-8

www.pegi.info

Plus

- + Value for money
- + More GTA awesomeness

Minus

- Nothing really

Bottom Line

Grand Theft Auto: Episodes From Liberty City offers great value while giving players a reason to dive back into Liberty City.

AVAILABLE AT
Look & Listen
For the Fans

91

068 www.nag.co.za

The Sims 3: World Adventures

More than just a bunch of stuff

Genre→ Simulation

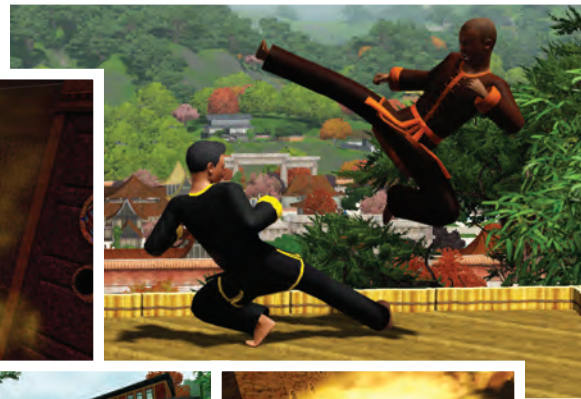
PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

THE SIMS FRANCHISE LENDS itself beautifully to expansions, and the game has explored all manner of things through add-ons in the past. However, there have also been a number of expansions that equate to little more than a bunch of new *Sims* stuff stuck in a box. These were obviously just there to milk the massive fan base, without adding to the game dynamics.

The Sims 3: World Adventures is not that kind of expansion pack. Sure, there are new items, décor, clothing and all that kind of stuff added to the game when it is installed, but *World Adventures* is the kind of expansion that modifies the game and introduces new kinds of ideas to the player. In short, it is the kind of expansion we want.

The expansion allows the player's characters to visit one of three exotic locations, loosely based on Egypt, France and the Far East. In these locations, the player can perform all the usual functions they could in a normal *Sims 3* town, although they are limited in time thanks to a visa system.

The characters can also undertake



numerous tasks that equate to a *Sims* version of adventures. These involve finding and collecting missions, as well as a bit of low-grade puzzle solving. If *Tomb Raider* ever had a *Sims* cousin, this would be it.

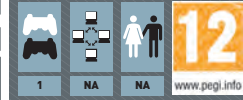
The new game dynamic elements may feel out of place to some, but they do add another level of activity to this popular game. In addition, the player can also learn several new skills, including photography and martial arts.

This solid first expansion for *The Sims 3* is hopefully a sign of things to come. It is imaginative and beneficial to the game, adding new levels of interaction and showing a strong evolution of the title. Every fan should have it. **NAG**

– Walt Pretorius



The Score



AVAILABLE AT
Look Listen
For the Fans

Bottom Line

This first *Sims 3* expansion is exactly what a *Sims* expansion should be: new items, new skills, new game dynamics and lots to do.



Developer→ Ubisoft Publisher→ Ubisoft Distributor→ Megarom Web→ www.csideadlyintent.com

CSI: Deadly Intent

Solving mysteries the old-fashioned way

Genre→ Puzzler

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

LIKE EVERY WELL-MILKED PROPERTY, the *CSI* TV show has spawned yet another game. This time, the player gets to investigate five cases with the help of virtual versions of the actual cast members, using a number of techniques seen on the show... hang on a tick, isn't that the same as last time?

The *CSI* series of games shows a trend in the videogame industry that is both good and bad. The new game is almost exactly like the last one, with one or two tweaks in terms of graphics and dynamics, but very little else. It, quite realistically, is the same as the last game for the most part. The trend is to pander to the desires of very casual gamers, who are fans of the show and will buy the title more because of their associations with the televised version of *CSI* than their desire to play a videogame. Sure, it keeps those people gaming, but it does nothing to evolve their game playing. It just offers more of the same. If you have played the other *CSI* games, then you know exactly what to expect – easy cases and guided game play that comes down to pixel hunting. The player



is as likely to solve a case by sweeping the cursor around the screen as they are by spotting clues. At least, the developers saw fit to mark the places clues were discovered this time around, cutting down significantly on the hunt and peck time.

Still, there is nothing really new here, which is frustrating. The franchise has great potential, but this potential is squandered by a release like this one. Obviously, it has been created so that most casual gamers can play it (based on the theory that they have older, less powerful PCs), but the whole affair is starting to feel horribly dated. **NAG**

– Walt Pretorius

The Score



AVAILABLE AT
Look Listen
For the Fans

Bottom Line

CSI fans may get a kick out of it, but gamers will find *Deadly Intent* old fashioned and far too easy.



Developer→ SNK Playmore Publisher→ SNK Playmore / Ignition Entertainment
Distributor→ Ster-Kinekor Entertainment Web→ www.kingoffighters12.com



The King of Fighters XII

Sure it looks great, but it's unfortunately not a good game

Genre→ Fighting

PC 360 PS3 Wii PS2 PSP DS

2009 HAS TO BE one of the better years in game history as far as 2D fighters are concerned. We've seen the release of several truly great games for the genre, and among these, there is sure to be something for everyone. As such, when the latest *King of Fighters* game was released, one would have expected that SNK Playmore would re-invent the series or deliver the most polished version of the game to date.

Sadly, this is not the case. In fact, this just may be the worst iteration in the franchise's history. Particularly disappointing considering that it's the game's first outing on current-generation consoles.

Any expectations one may have about the game are quickly killed by the opening sequence, which may not be the worst, but is far from what can be considered acceptable. The initial disappointment and underwhelming presentation are carried through to the main menu, which has very little; and save for the gallery and multiplayer options, is exactly what was there on the now truly ancient Neo Geo AES home console (where the franchise began).

KOF XII has not only the least number of playable characters in the history of the game, but it features only five locations.

Much like *KOF '98* and *2002*, there is no story to this game. For the first time, however, there are also no teams. It's a random selection of characters from the previous games, most of which are from the early days of the franchise. So, characters such as K' (pronounced K-Dash) are absent.

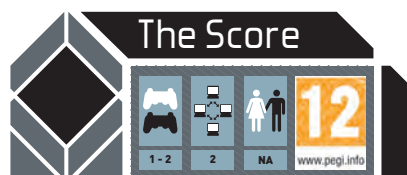
With all that said, the biggest disappointment with this game is how poorly it plays, especially if you are familiar with the previous games. The game has a slightly better pace than the older titles, and has a better balance of characters and their moves. These, however, have been ruined. For instance, Iori Yagami retains not a single one of his signature moves like the "Shiki Koto tsuki" and "Shiki Yami barai." In fact, save for his desperation move, he may as well be a completely new character. Fortunately, others, such as Robert Garcia, retain the vast majority of their moves, even though the execution of said moves and timing may be different. This change in some characters can sometimes make the game feel very unfamiliar, even to die-hard fans.

In terms of visuals, the game looks much better than any previous title, but the improvements, given what the hardware is capable of, are far from spectacular. Every sprite has been re-drawn and moves look significantly smoother than ever before, with more frames and a much richer colour palette. The fight locations, as few as they



may be, are well drawn with some great detail and lighting effects. This is by far the most impressive aspect of the game. This could have been an opportunity to re-launch the game and take it in a different direction, but sadly, it fails to even maintain anything from the previous outings. *KOF XII* is nothing short of tragic. **NAG**

Neo Sibeko



Plus
+ Smooth animations
+ Rich colours

Minus
- Small character roster
- Lacks depth
- Limited replay value

Bottom Line

Missed opportunity that could have breathed life into a dying franchise, but, instead, serves only to highlight the game's irrelevance.

AVAILABLE AT
Look & Listen
For the Fans

55

Tex Murphy: Mean Streets and Martian Memorandum

FEW TRULY GREAT VIDEOGAMES are as unsung as the *Tex Murphy* detective series. The adventures of this hard-boiled PI in the blasted-out husk of post-WWIII San Francisco have always played second fiddle to the high-profile offerings from LucasArts and Sierra, despite the fact that they've probably done more to advance and extend the genre than almost any other series.

Marrying a post-nuclear, dystopian society with the film noir antics of a socially awkward protagonist (whose love of Humphrey Bogart films drives him towards fedoras, Bourbon and wicked trench coats), the *Tex Murphy* games have an arguably unique premise that gets pulled off quite well. They typically start with simple cases: someone gets murdered, or kidnapped, or maybe both. Then, through questioning suspects and learning about the game world, everything somehow goes into the big time and you're uncovering some or other "Great Conspiracy of World-Shattering Proportions."

In these first two *Tex Murphy* games, *Mean Streets* and *Martian*

Memorandum, the developers experiment with a combination of story, action sequences, interrogation scenes, trial-and-error puzzles and even flight simulations, rather than relying on classic adventure game puzzles to hold the titles together. It's a unique approach that has its share of successes and failures, but by the end of it, you really **do** feel like a genuine, badass detective.

The games have also been credited with upping the adventure genre's bar in terms of graphics, sound and gameplay. With the release of *Mean Streets* in 1989 (back in the glory days of floppy installs and PC speakers) Tex was already chatting to people in a digitised voice and full-motion video through (gasp!) a 256-colour VGA world. He also flew around a virtual 3D city, tentatively experimented with one of the earliest mouse-driven interfaces for an adventure game, and proved that mashing very different game experiences and story ideas together can still somehow work.

The greatest pity about this series is how poorly it has aged, making



it less than accessible for modern gamers. First-time players won't see the marvels and advancements that wowed the crowds back in the eighties - instead, they'll be confronted with crappy 3D landscapes in onerous travel sequences and several unacceptably clumsy ideas that nonetheless identified the game as a pioneer in its heyday. In many ways, the mistakes that we can identify today are what every adventure game since has built upon.

But if you ever do feel like picking up the first two *Tex Murphy* games, it would be for two reasons: you genuinely appreciate the adventure genre, and you want to see what sort of games ushered in that glorious golden era. *Mean Streets* requires quite some determination to get through, but *Martian Memorandum* is an enjoyable, more "standard" experience, which could probably be considered the stronger of the two-game package and will be accessible to more players.

For everyone else: try later games in the series such as *Under a Killing Moon*, or the *Mean Streets* remake, *Overseer*. While they're not the earliest games in the *Tex Murphy* saga, they are definitely considered the most popular and will give you a nice, gentle introduction to the universe before you sink your teeth into their ancestors. **NAG**

Rodain Joubert

Amazing Spider-Man #612

Format: Comic Series | **Publisher:** Marvel | **Writer:** Mark Waid
Artist: Paul Azaceta | **Price:** R35.50

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #612 IS a double feature issue, but the main story, written by Mark Waid, continues from where issue 611 left off. Sasha and Ana Kraven have been methodically taking out Spider-Man's allies - first Madame Web, and then Spider-Woman. They have also enlisted the aid of Chameleon, and even the mercenary known as Deadpool. But whatever plans they have for Spider-Man remains to be seen. In the midst of the perpetual chaos that is Peter Parker's life, he doesn't notice anything different, as things go from bad to worse when one of his old foes, Electro, resurfaces. It does come as a bit of a shock to Spidey, however, that Electro has mobs of civilians supporting him now, and with some new tricks up his sleeve, he manages to knock Spidey on his confused ass. And so begins the Kravens' plan, throwing Spider-Man headfirst into their gauntlet.



Clive Burmeister



Cinderella: From Fabletown with Love #1

Format: Comic Miniseries | **Publisher:** Vertigo
Writer: Chris Roberson | **Artist:** Shawn McManus | **Price:** R27.95

TO MOST PEOPLE WHO know her, Cinderella is nothing more than a wealthy socialite, who travels the world as often as she checks in on her shoe store. Little do they know that she is actually a super-spy for Fabletown, the city within a city, where creatures of fable dwell in the real world, living amongst the regular "mundy" humans. Having just returned from a top-secret mission, she barely has time to pop by her store, "Glass Slipper Shoes," before she is dispatched on a new mission of top priority by her new boss, Beast (as in Beauty and the...). To those of you who haven't read the Fables trade paperbacks before, you really don't know what you're missing. Fables combines a lot of the classic elements and characters, which have made these various stories stand the test of time, but also gives them a new, modern-day twist and setting. Where else will you see Little Boy Blue as a famous war hero; or The Big Bad Wolf as the sheriff of Fabletown; or Cinderella as a butt-whipping "off the books" spy?



Clive Burmeister



Dark Avengers Volume #1

Format: Hardcover Book | **Publisher:** Marvel
Artists: Mike Deodato, Rain Beredo | **Writer:** Brian Michael Bendis | **Price:** R240

ALTERNATE WORLD STORY ARCS are always interesting to read, and what better material to mess with than the classic Avengers? *Dark Avengers* takes places somewhere within (and possibly after) the *Ultimates* side of the Marvel metaverse, with Tony Stark branded as a failure and stripped of his leadership of The Avengers. With him out of the way, Norman Osborn (AKA Green Goblin) makes his way up the chain of power and control, and eventually into the seat of leadership of The Avengers. As one would expect, what's left of The Avengers isn't happy about the new lad in power, and promptly tears the organisation apart - leaving room for Osborn to appoint his own replacements.



Dark Avengers is a great story for anyone looking to take a deeper (and pretty dark) look into the Marvel world. Bendis' writing is great, being satisfyingly cheesy at the right times, witty on occasion and always engaging. Combined with Deodato's incredible artwork (which is assisted perfectly by colouring by Rain Beredo), this collection of issues #1-6 is a well-balanced and fascinating addition to anyone's collection.

Geoff Burrows



The Darkness: Accursed Vol. 1

Format: Graphic Novel | **Publisher:** Top Cow | **Writer:** Phil Hester
Artist: Michael Broussard | **Price:** R44.95

JACKIE ESTACADO WAS AN orphan who was taken in by the Franchetti family, and trained as a hit man. When he became an adult, he discovered that he possesses an ancient supernatural ability called the "Darkness," which grants him almost unlimited power when the Sun goes down. Jackie used his newfound abilities to rise through the ranks and eventually became the boss. Now Jackie has relocated to Sierra Muñoz, where he and a new friend, Dr Kirchner, have taken over the country as drug lords, by selling a new Darkness-tainted drug called "Nightfall." But as Jackie has learnt over the years, nothing ever runs smoothly for long, and soon he is thrust into a civil war and a conspiracy that threatens to destroy his hold over the Darkness itself. With an action-packed, yet intriguing story and mesmerising artwork, *The Darkness: Accursed Vol. 1* is a good book at a good price.



Clive Burmeister



The Ghoul #1

Format: Comic Miniseries | **Publisher:** IDW | **Writer:** Steve Niles
Artist: Bernie Wrightson | **Price:** R39.50

STEVE NILES, ACCLAIMED HORROR writer of such popular titles as *30 Days of Night*, *Criminal Macabre* and *City of Dust*, is back with his latest comic, *The Ghoul*. In *The Ghoul*, Niles tackles the story of a monster that hunts monsters, with his usual meticulous attention for describing every gory detail. The Ghoul itself is a giant of a creature, with repulsive grey skin and misshapen features, but possesses a range of uncanny abilities that aid it in being a very successful detective of the bizarre and supernatural. When he's called to LA to assist Detective Lieutenant Klimpt with a case that borders on the unexplainable, The Ghoul must assist with the investigation, lending his own, unique specialties to the case, and also find time to squeeze in some of his own business while he's in town. The comic also features an ongoing short story of the character, also by Niles.



Clive Burmeister



Killer of Demons

Format: Graphic Novel | **Publisher:** Image Comics | **Writer:** Christopher Yost | **Artist:** Scot Wegener | **Price:** R120

JUNIOR ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE DAVE Sloan is a regular kind of guy; he goes to work, has a girlfriend, and chats with his workmates about mundane stuff. Except for one little detail: he can see demons. At least, that's according to an angel who once visited, and told him that God had chosen him to hunt down demons that are disguised as humans. Net result: one confused, possibly schizophrenic, mass murderer. Dave must deal with his life as a demon slayer, and find a balance between the world of devils, angels, the afterlife and all things occult.

Killer of Demons is funny – really funny. Yost's (co-writer of *New X-Men* and *X-Force*) writing is punchy and keeps the story running at a frantic pace, making it quite possible to dash through this book in a single sitting. The book's dark humour, reminiscent of the works of Jhonen Vasquez, is perfectly paired with Wegener's art style, which you may recognise from his work on *Atomic Robo*. Every panel, from a simple office scene to an intense fight, is filled with character and plenty of colour.



Geoff Burrows



Fullmetal Alchemist Trading Figures

RRP: R60 each

Supplier: www.awx.co.za

Series: Prop Plus Petit: Fullmetal Alchemist

These diminutive figures depict various characters from the anime *Fullmetal Alchemist*. They also come with various diminutive accessories. What they basically allow you to do is re-enact scenes from the show, albeit diminutively.

You'll never know which diminutive figure you'll receive in the diminutive packaging, so you'll have to buy a bunch of them and hope that you either don't get any duplicates (thereby allowing you to complete your diminutive collection), or that your friends are willing to trade the figures that they've gotten with you. Such is the beauty and frustration of diminutive trading figures.



Batgirl Version 2 Vinyl Figure

RRP: R475

Supplier: www.awx.co.za

Series: Ame-Comi: Batgirl

The second version of Batgirl in DC Direct's *Ame-Comi* line of superhero figures, this particular figure depicts Cassandra Cain posing with a set of batarangs with (much

like the Alucard figure) bats fluttering about behind her. Clearly, the creators were also going for the edgier look with this one, and everyone knows that bats obviously scream sexy. It comes with a display stand and the aforementioned bats/batarangs.



Alucard: Blood and Bats Version

RRP: R190

Supplier: www.awx.co.za

Series: Hellsing Search & Destroy Figure Collection: Volume 1

Alucard (from the anime *Hellsing*) is depicted here in miniature form, with generous amounts of blood and a number of surprisingly docile bats giving the figure that coveted edgy look and feel that we're sure the creators were going for. We're just wondering how much cash Alucard spends on dry-cleaning his digs, because guano stains probably aren't easy to remove.



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How to

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About backups and copyright

Browser Wars

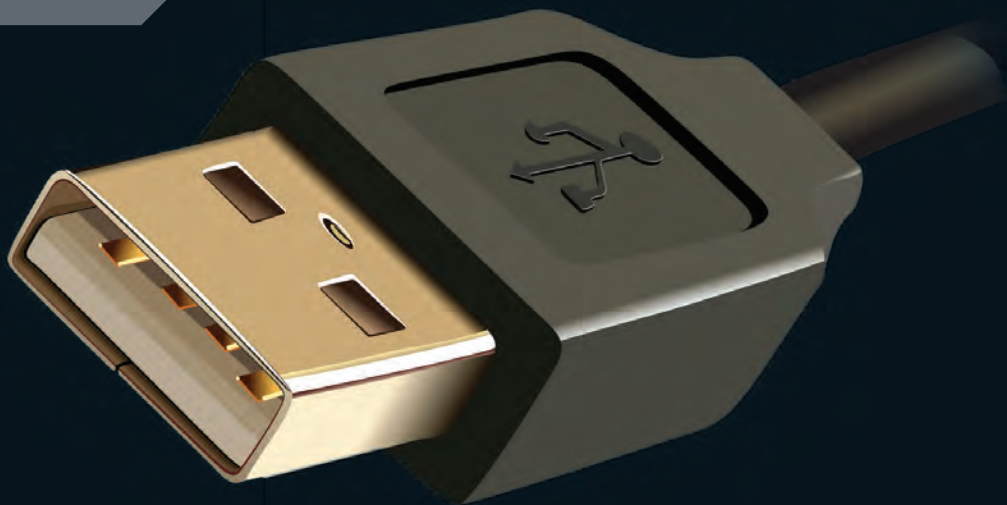


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USB 3.0 and SATA 6Gb/sec Arrive

IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE that the USB standard and connector have been with us for more than 12 years. In fact, development on the standard actually began 16 years ago this year. For most of us, however, our true introduction to USB peripherals was in the last couple of years of last century.

In 2000, we were introduced to USB 2.0, which has seen us through ten years; and it's safe to say that it is the most pervasive peripheral interface on computing devices to date. With that said, with each passing year, it has become obvious just how limited USB 1.1/2.0 is - especially when dealing with mass storage. There have been competing and technically better alternatives such as FireWire 800, but those have never really picked up outside of niche markets because of royalties and other issues.

Finally we have USB 3.0, and besides being significantly faster than the 2.0 standard, it is backwards compatible and supports some new features that make it a better and more appropriate standard than USB 2.0. Besides being backwards compatible, the new standard allows transfer speeds of up to 5Gb/sec in theory, compared to the outgoing 480Mbps of USB 2.0. In fact, this makes it faster than any other interconnect and interface we have had on the PC - save for SATA 6Gb/sec. This obviously doesn't affect the vast majority of flash drives, as they are far too slow to saturate the current theoretical maximum of 60MB/sec data rate of USB 2.0. But for portable hard drives, this new standard provides plenty of benefits.

Almost all modern-day 7,200rpm hard drives are able to provide sustained transfer rates of at least 65MB/sec and some above 100MB/sec. USB 3.0 allows these drives to reach these speeds. Because USB 3.0 is full duplex, reading and writing to external drives at the same time does not suffer the same performance penalties as it did in the past. USB 3.0 also uses a separate set of wiring in the connector, which makes it possible to transfer at 3.0 and 2.0 speeds simultaneously without any performance penalties - a very useful feature for hubs.

Around the same time that USB 3.0 was introduced, drive controllers with third-generation SATA capability were introduced. Much like the new USB standard, it provides even more bandwidth at a maximum of 6Gb/sec (as the name suggests), newer NCQ functionality, and other changes that are geared at speeding up high bandwidth video. In particular, this new standard will benefit SSDs, which are beginning to saturate the 250MB/sec limit that the current second-generation SATA standard provides. New controllers for both USB 3.0 and SATA 6Gb/sec will be needed. They, however, retain backwards compatibility, but not all available USB 2.0 devices will be able to work with a new USB 3.0 controller.

As exciting as this is, Intel has delayed the adoption of these new standards onto their chipsets until 2011, which also means that USB 3.0 devices will take a little longer to show up than we would have liked. This applies to AMD's controllers as well, as the 800-series chipsets are also lacking USB 3.0 and SATA 6Gb/sec functionality.

This has not stopped motherboard and add-in card manufacturers from providing this functionality. GIGABYTE has released at least six motherboards with USB 3.0 and SATA 6Gb/sec support. ASUS has also introduced an adapter in the form of a PCI Express card that works with their motherboards to add these features. ECS is also said to be preparing a motherboard with such functionality. It should be noted that all these products use a third-party controller to provide this support, and as such, drivers will be required to make any device connected to these ports work.

That also means that it may not be possible to set up some of these devices as boot drives or primary drives where the operating system may be installed. But this depends on the motherboard more than anything else. We will be testing some USB 3.0 and SATA 6Gb/sec devices in the near future, but so far, they both look like winners.

Snippets

Microsoft's **Games for Windows LIVE** online service has been updated to include DirectX 11 support for future titles, as well as a downloadable standalone client.

AVG Gaming Protection Software is now available countrywide. The software works in the background to identify threats and block them without hogging system resources, allowing you to safely game online.

All new **Alienware Area-51** and Aurora desktop PCs and their M15x and M17x gaming laptops will now have the full version of Valve's puzzle shooter *Portal* pre-loaded on the system, as well as an install of Valve's Steam download client.

NVIDIA's latest **195.62 version drivers** include additional SLI and multi-GPU support for a number of new PC games (*Modern Warfare 2*, *Borderlands*). They also include performance improvements for *Need For Speed: Shift*.

NAG Awards

DREAM MACHINE: We have a dream. That only the best hardware gets this hot chick, waving her derriere in the air like she just don't care.

HARDWARE: Ever wonder why it's called hardware? If something has this award, then someone got hard for the ware.



Hardware Scoring System

Our hardware scoring system is based on the reviewer's expert opinion. The scale is from 1 to 5 with no fractional values. Each number has a specific meaning, described below. Most products will score 3 or 4, with the occasional 5 or 2, and almost never 1. Note that a high price alone can never lower a score below 3.

- 5 **The stuff of Legends.** Buy it while you can, we already have.
- 4 **A good deal;** worth it if you're shopping for one.
- 3 **What you'd expect,** no problems. You might want to wait for a sale.
- 2 **This has some issues.** You should shop around for something else.
- 1 **The stuff of Nightmares.** You'll be sorry you got one, even for free.

SteelSeries Siberia Headphones and USB soundcard

The Siberia Headphone is an affordable solution for gamers, but can also be used with iPods, MP3 players or handheld gaming devices. Features include head-band suspension and foam earcups that surround the ear. They are available in either glossy white or black.

Also available in black or white is the Siberia USB soundcard. This product was designed for gamers with on-board soundcards or gamers who regularly find themselves playing at other computers. The 12-channel equalizer allows for tweaking to personal preferences, while the built-in effects processor can provide ambience and other effects.



#260MB/sec

OCZ Technology has released the Colossus Solid State Drive. Aimed primarily at the desktop user, the Colossus SSD boasts extremely fast read and write speeds of 260MB/sec, uses a SATA II interface and an internal RAID 0 configuration. It also holds the claim to fame of being the first SSD to offer up to one terabyte of storage.



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64-BIT VS. 32-BIT

From: Andrew Pekeur

"HI, MY NAME IS Andrew and I need some advice please. I'm currently using an Intel E7400 CPU, 2GB 800MHz RAM (soon to be 4GB), and a 9800GT 512MB. I'd like to know if there is any significant gaming performance difference between using Vista 32-bit or Vista 64-bit as I am still using Win XP 32-bit SP3 and would like to change in favour of DX10. And would overclocking my CPU and GPU be worth it? Thanks."

Neo: Switching from a 32-bit to a 64-bit operating system will give you performance gains, but Vista 64-bit will appear to be slower than XP. The better switch would be to Windows 7 64-bit. As for how useful overclocking would be, there are always gains to be had and it might well be worth it.

PC SYSTEM COMPARISONS

From: Exodus

"HOWZIT NAG. YOU GUYS at NAG are awesome whether for the humour or straight up brilliant reviews of both hardware and software. I have been looking around in preparation for an upgrade of my system and have come with three questions. We all know how the Core i7 series and the Phenom II series compete, but I would like to know how the Core i7-920 compares to the Phenom II X4 965. Also would a Core i7-920 be worthwhile without a triple-channel DDR3 setup? The power ratings that PC components are rated at, how much leeway should we give to these ratings when choosing a PSU? Keep rocking."

Neo: The Phenom II isn't geared at competing with the Core i7, but the Core 2 range - hence the similar price points. Having said that, the Phenom II X4 965 will give about the same performance in general as the Core i7-920 in games. On the LGA1366 platform, triple channel is great, but won't affect game performance heavily should you decide that dual channel is what you would rather use. When deciding what PSU to buy, rather be on the safe side and buy at least a 600-watt brand-name PSU if you plan on using a Phenom II or Core i7.

WHICH LAPTOP TO PICK

From: Lee Fountain

"IHAVE JUST BEEN GIVEN an allowance of R15,000 to buy a laptop from my company. As I am a fan of NAG magazine and also an enthusiastic gamer, I would like to get a laptop that I can run decent games on. I have had a look at the ASUS M70VR, which has a decent processor and has a NVIDIA GeForce 9600GS. I have never bought an ASUS laptop before, so was wondering if these laptops are any good... And how well does this graphics card fare against games that are coming out... Also, do you have any suggestions on which laptop I could get with my allowance. I

was looking at Dells, but they are rather expensive and you don't get the same specs... One more thing. I was looking at the Dell Website in the US and they are bringing out the Core i7 with their laptops at a price range from \$999 to \$1,499. If you do a straight conversion from dollars to rands, it is relatively cheap... Would it not be cheaper if I bought direct from them, or would my shipping costs be too great? Regards."

Neo: When buying a notebook, support should be your number one priority because they will all break sooner or later. So, buying it overseas means you'll effectively have no support should anything happen to it, or you will pay a fortune sending it back and forth. R15,000 will not get you an i7-based notebook locally. At least not yet - maybe much later on in the year. But at the beginning of 2010, it's not happening. As for the ASUS notebook, the graphics cards in notebooks are inherently slower than their desktop equivalents, but having said that, the M70VR will play the vast majority of games on the market today (and some that will be released in the coming year) with no problem.

NVIDIA 9800GT VS. ATI 4830

From: Matthew Figueira

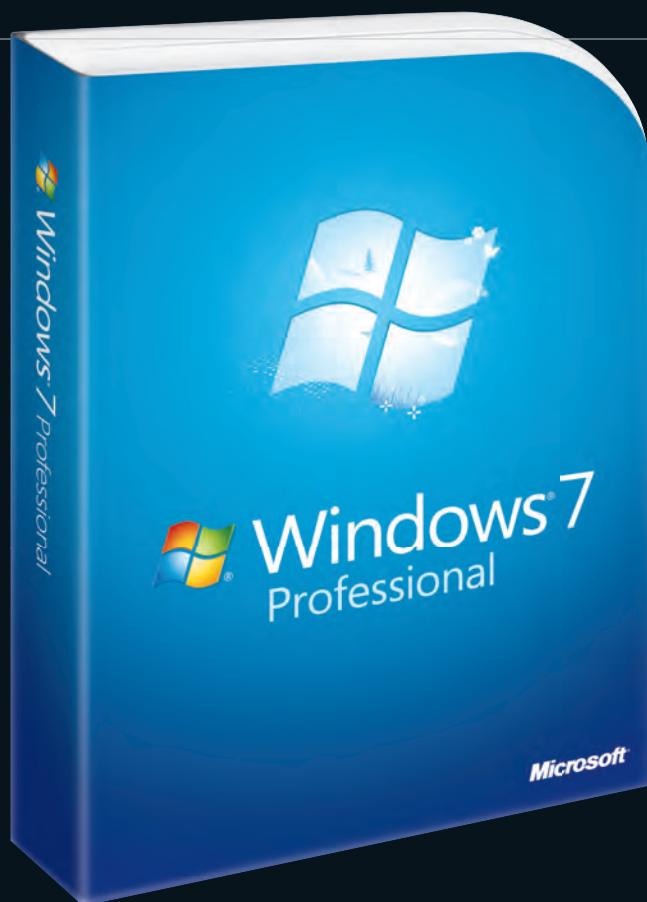
"IHAVE HAD A 9800GT running in my PC for just little over a year now. I was fortunate enough to win a PC recently, and it came with an ATI 4830. I have not really heard much about it, but from what I have managed to scrape through online, the 4830 is slightly better than the 9800GT. I can't find anything definite. I would just like to know which one I would be better off with. That aside, I may well end up selling both of them, and buying a better graphics card. What would you recommend as a decent (not destroy my wallet) upgrade? I do not know too much about the latest set of cards. I think I'm looking for something between end :) Your help and advice would be greatly appreciated! Kind regards."

Neo: If you are going to keep any of the graphics cards, rather keep the 9800GT. If you sell both of them, consider getting a Radeon HD 4890 graphics card. It's selling at very low prices and the performance is still incredible (better than the HD 5770 and GTX 260).

HYBRID SLI

From: Paul Wasson

"BEING HOTLY TOTED BY NVIDIA, Hybrid SLI is a monumental failure that no one seems to know about... For those who don't know, this technology allows one to SLI a [discrete] graphics card with an [integrated] on-board GPU. In my case, a 9800GT and an 8300. Following a clean install of Vista 64, Hybrid SLI's activation was supposed to, at the very least, give me another three or four frames per second in Demigod than without. And it does. I'm very pleased



with the performance boost. But, and this is no exaggeration, within one hour of installing Vista, the machine crashes, with the dreaded blue screen mockingly glaring in the dim room. Not once, but twice. Furthermore, the machine won't run Demigod for more than five or so minutes! Catastrophe! Upon scouring the Internet, I have been unable to find any support for my predicament. Nor have any of the other people experiencing Hybrid SLI related crashes. Woe are we all when an a promising technology is used for nothing more than marketing... Not that I'll win, but."

Neo: I'm surprised you got a performance boost using a 9800GT and the on-board VGA. Hybrid SLI is made for VGA cards within the same family and for low-end discreet cards, so you can pair an 8600GT and the 8300, which are much closer in performance than a 9800GT and the 8300. Anyway, your problems could be related to heat, driver incompatibilities or other issues with the system. Without a doubt, Hybrid SLI could be better, but the issues you are experiencing have little to do with NVIDIA's marketing. Monitor your IGP temperatures and make sure they are not above 80°C.

.....

If you'd like our tech guru, Neo, to answer your hardware questions, send a mail to lauren.dasneves@tidemedia.co.za. There aren't any prizes for the letters we print, just simple and honest advice (that is, if we can even decipher the garbled e-mail we sometimes get). **NAG**



Dream Machine

RIG OF THE MONTH

From: Bryan Thompson

"GOOD DAY TO ALL at NAG! My name is Bryan Thompson, I live in East London, and I am a gaming junkie! Not to my girlfriend's amusement, but anyway. I have been buying your mag for about 1½ years now and I make it a habit to skip straight to the impressive 'RIG OF THE MONTH' to admire the beast that all would bow to. But every time I do so, I cannot help but wonder what it would cost. Would it be at all possible for you at NAG to put an estimated recommended retail price for the entire machine. Just for us all to get an idea of how much we must beg, borrow and not steal, but persuade to be able to afford a beast like that. I wait in anticipation for the December issue to see if you have granted my wish. Kind regards. PS: Great magazine!"

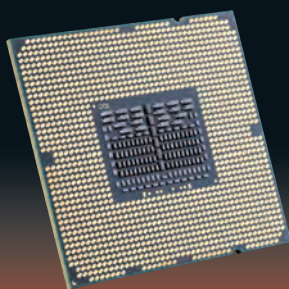
CPU	Intel i7-975 XE	R11,500
Cooling	Thermaltake BigWater 780	R2,507
MOBO	GIGABYTE GA-EX58-EXTREME	R5,199
RAM	OCZ Triple Channel PC12800 DDR3	R1,900
GPU	ASUS EAH5870	R5,300
Storage	Patriot Torqx 128GB SSD	R5,799
Sound Card	ASUS Xonar Essence ST	R1,899
Headset	Logitech G35	R1,499
Keyboard	Logitech G19	R2,199
Mouse	Logitech G9x Laser	R1,099
PSU	IKONIK Vulcan 1,200W	R4,200
Chassis	Cooler Master Cosmos S	R2,900
Monitor	Samsung SyncMaster T260 LCD	R3,799
Total		R49,800

These prices should only be used as guidelines, as pricing may change at any time. The same computer can be built for a little less if one shops around, but R50,000 should be the budget. We will continue to update prices as components change in the machine.



Headphones

Logitech G35 Surround Sound
www.logitech.com



Processor

Intel Core i7 Extreme 975
www.intel.com



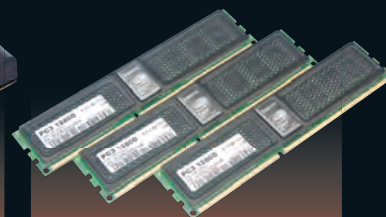
Motherboard

GIGABYTE GA-EX58-EXTREME
www.gigabyte.co.za



Graphics Card

ASUS EAH5870
<http://za.asus.com>



Memory

OCZ Triple Channel PC12800 DDR3
www.ocztechnology.com



Case

Cooler Master Cosmos S
www.coolermaster.com



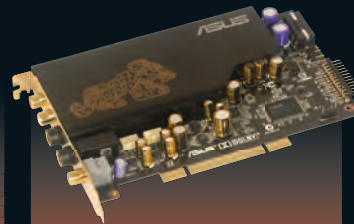
Storage

Patriot Torqx 128GB SSD
www.patriotmemory.com



Power Supply

IKONIK Vulcan 1,200W PSU
www.ikonik.com



Sound

ASUS Xonar Essence ST
<http://za.asus.com>



Monitor

Samsung SyncMaster T260 LCD
www.samsung.co.za



Keyboard

Logitech G19
www.logitech.com



Mouse

Logitech G9x Laser
www.logitech.com



Cooling

Thermaltake BigWater 780
www.thermaltake.com



BY NEO SIBEKO

We need physics more than speed

IN LATE NOVEMBER, AMD released the Radeon HD 5970, the fastest graphics card on the market with nothing else close to the performance it delivers. A great card with mind-boggling power that handles every game on the market with ease (including *Crysis* at 2,560 x 1,600 with 4x AA) with power to spare.

Great for gamers and competitive overclockers all over the world, as it's everything we could have wanted from a graphics card.

With that said, right now, in 2010, one has to wonder if being fast is enough. Is that all a graphics card needs to be, especially considering how much you are paying for it? This is not a rant about how cheap consoles are or how much better they are compared to computers. This is just a comparison of what you get visually compared to what you pay.

At the time of writing, one couldn't even buy a Radeon 5970 because there was simply no stock (TSMC's fault, not AMD's); and where there was stock, it was selling for R4,450 at the least. Now keep in mind that this is a lot of money to pay for any single component. However, PC gamers and enthusiasts are used to these prices and sometimes even higher, so that isn't the point. The point is that an Xbox 360 Elite costs you exactly half of that. This is a problem because as most games are multi platform these days, the visuals you experience on the Xbox – or PS3, for that matter – will be the same as those on a PC with a R4,450 graphics card.

It is true that you can enable copious amounts of AA on the PC and play at an even higher resolution if you have a 30-inch display, but one has to wonder if it's worth paying twice as much for that alone. As much as we might try to defend our huge investments in graphics cards, most of the arguments do not hold any merit. We simply are not getting what we should be for the money we are paying.

With that said, if one has hardware-accelerated physics systems, then the additional R2,225 makes a little more sense. This is because you are genuinely getting something for your money that just isn't available on the consoles. It is not subjective and cannot be argued. It is available on the PC but absent on the console; and best of all, it need not cost you an additional R2,225. In fact, it might cost you less than R734 to add such functionality.

While physics-accelerated games are still limited, this number is increasing every quarter. With that said, it would be great if AMD would develop a physics driver for their hardware, especially since they have the fastest hardware on the market. By doing this, the company could better justify their R4,450

graphics card. Refusing to do so (the company states it will only support open initiatives, not proprietary ones) doesn't help their graphics cards, because their hardware still lacks a feature the competition's R734 graphics card has.

The competition's graphics cards are nowhere near what AMD can provide in terms of raw performance with the DirectX 11 parts, but speed just isn't enough. A GeForce GTX 275 paired with the old 9600GT or the newer and cheaper GeForce GT 240 will cost you about R2,596. Yes, you will not be playing *Crysis* at 2,560 x 1,600, but as more physics-accelerated games show up, you will be able to play games in a way that the R4,450 HD 5970 cannot. There is no way around this, especially with NVIDIA having blocked PhysX acceleration when there is an ATI graphics card installed in the system. (This may sit unfavourably with many, and in a way, it is a questionable thing to do – but that's an issue for another day.)

The point made here is that there has to be more than tremendously high frame rates and an equally high resolution to justify why investing in a R4,450 graphics card is worth it. This would hold true for any NVIDIA part costing the same as well – the difference is that such a part would have physics acceleration. So, while the price is the same, the experience is different.

Be it through PhysX or a new library that comes to market, both graphics card vendors need to have this functionality, as it gets increasingly hard to justify why one needs to spend so much on a graphics card that essentially gives you the same visuals and experience you can get at half the price. **NAG**

“There is no way around this, especially with **NVIDIA** having **blocked PhysX acceleration** when there is an ATI graphics card installed in the system.”

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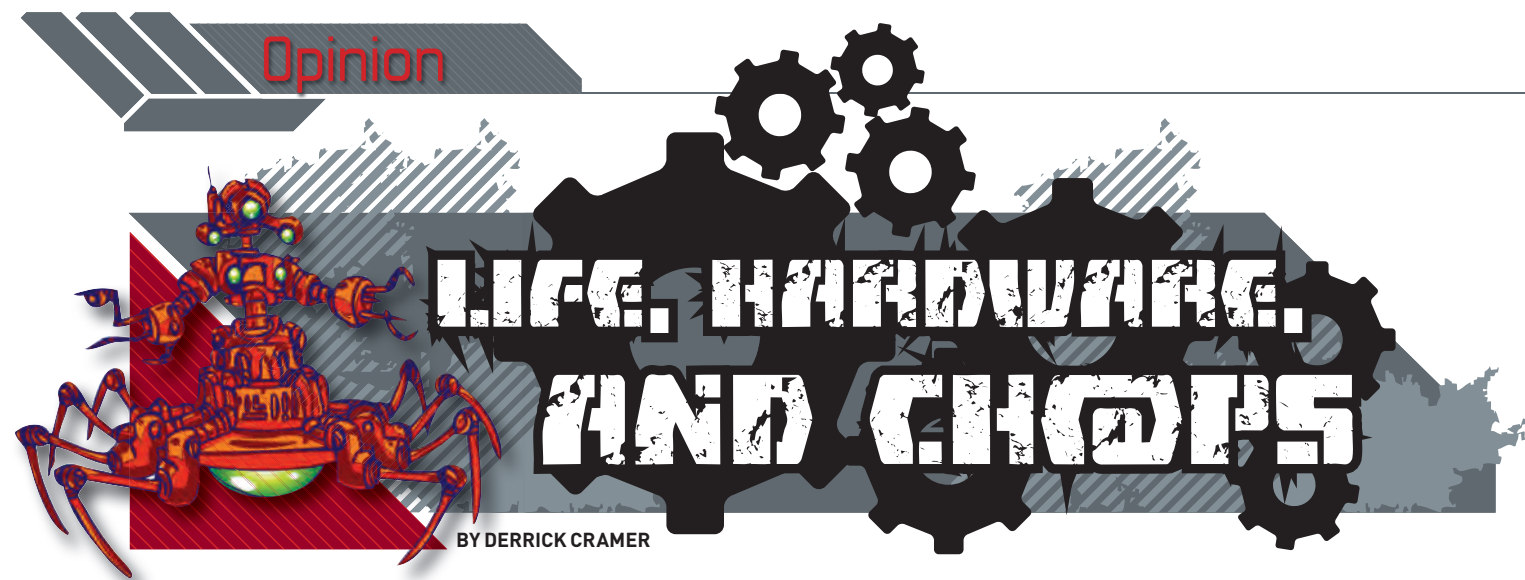
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"He has no idea, but I'm about to pimp his ride"

THINK FOR A SECOND about *Pimp My Ride*, *The Fast and the Furious*, the *Need for Speed: Underground* games, and Durban. What do all these things have in common? They have modified cars. Whether performance or just aesthetics, cars are the toys of men (and some ladies) built to be customised. But what if you can't justify the insane price tags of body kits, spoilers and "doof, doof" subwoofers? Easy, you buy yourself a PC.

For the last eight or nine years, the PC market has taken a leaf out of the car industry's book, and the result is a market with fans of all colours, strangely shaped pieces of copper used to replace normally shaped pieces of copper, water-cooling kits for those who want to live dangerously... The list goes on. Neon galore, LCD panels controlling how fast your fans go, old-school dials showing the volume level of your left and right audio channels. It seems we've thought of everything and the PC market is a good reflection of its bigger brother, the car market. Yes? Surprisingly not.

Think about it, every orifice of your case is in some way customisable. You can always find something to put somewhere, but you cannot customise the case itself. Sure, there are one or two guys who will go out and make something nice (DAE_JA_V00's project epiphany featured on one of the rAge videos a while back comes to mind), and then there are those who try to mod the case and end up with nothing more than a cheese grater. So, why won't one individual take a leap of faith, and in the spirit of the many car-modification businesses, start his own PC-mod business.

Think of it. The client brings in a case. He or she wants some strange, near-impossible design. After talking to one of the in-house design specialists, they decide on something doable and go for it. Two weeks later, the client is happy with his or her new, one-of-a-kind case. The case-mod business is happy with their now-full wallets.

With the price of high-end cases often exceeding R3,000, these "supercar" cases really are out of the price range of the masses. How expensive is it really to build the frame of a case like this? Or buy a R600 case and modify it to your liking? If you have the right equipment, not very. If you have access to the raw materials, not very. If you have ideas that will appeal

to the masses, not very.

I know what you're thinking: "Good idea, I think I should start one of these up..." No. First off, stealing my idea (which I stole from the car industry) would be bad. So, if you steal it I will expect my cheque in the mail. Secondly, is South Africa ready for this? Are we ready for an expensive niche service in a time when many of us are struggling? And even if we are, if one individual screws this up, who else will bother with it in the future?

So, I say to you: bide your time, design your dream case and have a go at it. Then, when you fail (which you undoubtedly will), try again, until we have a community of modders all itching to show off their skills for the masses. Who knows, when I start this shop up you might just make it past the interviews. **NAG**

"For the last eight or nine years, the PC market has taken a leaf out of the car industry's book, and **the result is a market with fans of all colours, strangely shaped pieces of copper used to replace normally shaped pieces of copper, water-cooling kits for those who want to live dangerously...**"

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Free, reliable

By Russell Bennett

THE PROBLEM WITH BENCHMARKING

Technology is that it's ultimately based in competition. And competition doesn't evolve with anything like the pace of the tech being tested; in fact, it quite quickly stagnates, basically of necessity.

One guy, for instance, posts a record-breaking score on 3DMark03 using nitrogen-cooled but still-bubbling processors, which just manage to eke their way through a full benchmark run, and then the bar is set. For others to beat this record, then, they have to bench using 03 as well, as using say, 3DMark Vantage yields results that cannot be compared to this record. And so, although the underlying technology and available benchmark software move on, the hardcore benchmarking crowd gets stuck competing using an older platform, and begins to churn out numbers and results that are all but meaningless to the average gamer looking for the best grunt from his PC.

And that's without even uncovering the meaninglessness of synthetic benchmarks anyway, which have time and time again been shown to be circumvented by clever developers embedding app-specific 'booster' hooks in newer driver versions – to quote just the most famous case of this practice. So, although synthetics can be useful in establishing an overall 'baseline' result, they aren't actually a foolproof indication of the performance of a particular collection of hardware in a particular gaming environment.

No, for that you need real-world gaming benchmarks. And while many of these require some expertise to get reliable results from, fortunately for Joe Public you do also get quite a few good ones embedded into

the game engine itself. Sometimes you don't even need to shell out the cash for a retail version of the game either. The developers release these benchmark routines in demos, specifically so that potential customers can be sure their machines will be capable of playing the latest title, without having to shell out a substantial amount of extra cash for new hardware bits.

There are also some useful applications, again available for free online, which can give you alternate, more focused views on specific performance elements. Yes, these are synthetic tests once again, but they are gratis and not as widely used as the big-name synthetics. Which is good, as developers aren't therefore driven to cheat the system for bigger numbers.

This is what we'll be going through in the course of this feature: the currently-available crop of free game demos and benchmark apps that you can use at home to get a reliable gauge of how your machine will perform in the latest gaming titles. We'll even point you in the right direction towards getting your hands on the right pieces of software, giving you all the tools you need for bragging (or shameful face-hiding) among your PC-obsessed peers.

For reference, we've included scores from two systems for each bench. My own potent but now somewhat aging test rig is powered by a QX9770 CPU, running its quad cores at 3.2GHz per core. It isn't quite a Core i7, but comes pretty damn close most of the time. Graphics are courtesy of a Radeon HD 4870 (512MB, GDDR5), and the memory is made up of just 2GB (probably its biggest weakness) of Corsair DDR3 running at 1,333MHz. All installed on an Intel BoneTrail 2 Extreme MOBO.

We also ran these tests on a 'visiting' Evetech test machine (reviewed December 2009, page 96), featuring the latest real-world offering from Intel, a Core i5-750 CPU running its four cores at 2.67GHz apiece. It has 4GB of DDR3 installed, OCZ parts running at the same 1,333MHz, but most importantly of all, features the latest GPU powerhouse from ATI, an HD 5850 with a full gigabyte of GDDR5! For maximum oomph, we even put the benchmarking OS (Windows 7) and all the installed apps onto a 160GB Intel SSD, which is just rampant in its performance.

Finally, we ran all the benches without the anal-retentive killing of all background processes for the biggest numbers, so our AV, synching suites, virtual drives and the like remained active in the background. Yes, this does introduce some inconsistency, but then we aren't actually going for records in this case, and in the real world, you'll be running your games like this as well.

Without further ado then...

CRYSIS

All right, so this isn't exactly the latest title. But seriously, it may have been released in 2007, but this game remains a core real-world benchmark. Most testers have migrated to the newer version of *Crysis* of course (*Warhead*), but the original will still push even the most well-endowed machine to its limits. And, the demo is available for free online – if you still don't have a copy of this killer game in your collection! Yes, it's a huge download at 1.9GB, so hopefully you still have a NAG DVD in your archives somewhere with it on.

It's then quite simply a matter of running the two batch (.bat) files found in the root of



benchmarking

your *Crysis* folder, called `Benchmark_GPU` and `Benchmark_CPU`; each stressing different components – pretty self-explanatory really. Before executing these commands, however, you need to go into the game normally and set the level of detail how you want it to be tested. If you're confident your rig is a completely impervious monster, crank it all up to Very High with 8x MSAA at 1,600 x 1,200. I dare you. Even powerful machines will see slideshows at this kind of detail!

Run the CPU and GPU benches in turn. The game will launch and run through four loops of each demo scene, with the GPU focusing on the vastness of the island and the CPU on the physics of mass destruction. At the end of each, the game will simply exit, and you'll wonder where on Earth the results have gone? Never fear, just browse to the `\Crysis\Game\Levels\Island` folder using your file manager of choice. You'll find a pair of .log files that have been created, named for each benchmark run (CPU and GPU). Open this file in any text editor and there they are in all their detail.

Subsequent runs will simply have their results added to these two .log files, which is nice. At the ridiculous quality setting I jokingly recommended earlier, a decent system would average 7-8fps. Something of a beast will get up to a 14fps average, which is where our Evetech rig sat. But then, these are ridiculous quality levels. The extra RAM also helped here: *Crysis* runs out of system RAM quite quickly like this.

RESIDENT EVIL 5

For *Resident Evil 5*, the developers actually released a version specifically

for benchmarking purposes, as previous incarnations of this game did become quite popular benchmark tools. This fifth iteration of the zombie-slaughtering fest isn't actually quite as demanding as some previous versions, but works well enough.

When you execute this 'demo', you have only three options: Settings, Benchmarks, and Quit. So, go into the first one and max everything out at 1,600 x 1,200. Then, just return to the title screen, and select the second option: Benchmarks. There are two types to choose from here. Variable is good for assessing your machine's capacity to run the game at its current detail levels, but useless for getting a reliable, comparable performance figure for bragging rights. So, choose Fixed.

The game will launch into a pretty arbitrary scene, where a medium-sized crowd is being whipped into some sort of a weird frenzy by a megaphone-wielding fatty. They don't do much beyond bay, jeer, and shake their various weapons about. The camera, meanwhile, zooms about, using some peculiar angles, looking at the crowd through dirty glass, and the like. There is a progress counter in the top left, so don't press the Esc key until this hits 100%, and you'll get your results. If you simply leave it alone at this point, it'll repeat the process endlessly after half a minute or so on the results screen, until you hit Esc to exit.

My own machine managed a respectable 'B' rating in this game, averaging a playable 53.8fps for the scene. The monster, of course, worked much better for an all-singing full-marks pass. An average of 64.3fps and an 'A' rating overall.

STREET FIGHTER IV

Yes, Capcom's reborn classic fighter does have a demo version available (396MB) and it does include the built-in benchmark run. The only problem with the *SF4* benchmark is that it's sort of lightweight. Although they did at least up the in-game frame cap of 65fps for the benchmarking component, it's still capped 10fps further up the scale. And it doesn't actually take all that much of a gaming monster to achieve this kind of score.

Still, it's a useful test nevertheless; you just have to work around this issue by bumping the quality levels to their most extreme. So, 1,600 x 1,200, 8x AA, 16x filtering, and all details as high as they can go are the order of the day here. Once you've set it up like this, select "Start Game" and then, in the secondary "Main" menu that follows, choose "Benchmark."

The game will launch three action-packed fight scenes followed by a flyby of several characters on screen at once – the hardest thing for your GPU to render in *SF4*. At the end, a screen will present you with your results. In my case, a score of 6,984 at an average of 74.65fps, and a recommendation to turn the detail up further still! Our powerhouse test bench didn't even notice that *SF4* was benchmarking it, and with three of its cores idle and its GPU calculating mission-control data for NASA's next fake moon landing, simply pegged the frame rate at the 75fps limit.

TOM CLANCY'S H.A.W.X.

Flight simulators, especially good ones, have always been resource hungry. I can count off several from the top of my head



that were simply beyond the capabilities of the machines at the moment of their launch, only coming into their own later when hardware caught up with what they were doing. *Tom Clancy's H.A.W.X.* is another to add to this list, and is a stern test of modern hardware. It's also the second-biggest download here at 1.2GB. Once it's installed, remember to execute the DX10.exe file if your GPU can take it.

Once into the game, it's a simple enough process. Go to Options, Video Settings, and tweak everything up as far as it can go, including the options in the third "DirectX 10" tab. You can leave the resolution at 1,280 x 1,024 [it'll be challenging enough like that], but crank the FSAA up to 8x to get some proper heat into your GPU. Once all the changes have been applied [you might need to restart the game for some of them to take effect], just click the Test Performance button on this same settings screen for the rolling benchmark to get underway.

H.A.W.X. tests all sorts of things, all at once, including various types of DX9 and 10 shaders as well as vast landscapes to test raw rendering performance, and will find older machines wanting. My own system, using the settings detailed above, yielded a maximum of 130fps and an average of 53fps, while our beastly Evetech 5850-boosted rig scored a maximum of just 109fps but averaged 60fps on the nose. It presents you with just these two figures at the end of the run, making the entire process rather straightforward on the whole.

UNIGINE HEAVEN

Unigine Heaven is one of the newest, free benchmarking tools available, and the community is still working out exactly what to make of this interesting engine. But it does have the singular distinction of being the first benchmark to support DX11, so these guys have a good jump on the more entrenched competition as a result. It's also a pretty reasonable download at 138MB. There are other demos available,

but *Heaven* is the benchmarking utility, so that's the one you really want to measure your machine's performance with.

A splash screen will load first, allowing you to choose your code path, resolution, and filtering levels. We'd recommend 1,280 x 1,024 with 8x AA at first, as a challenging but not necessarily rig-munching start-up. Then, click the Run button.

It doesn't run, though. It launches into the floating world, very reminiscent of the animated *Dragon Hunters* series and its madcap physical and architectural properties, and starts to run through the scenes. But it isn't benchmarking yet. There is a series of buttons along the top of the screen, allowing you to switch cameras, change settings inside the engine, and one simply titled "Benchmark." Click on this and sit back.

Running through the 23 stages of this scene will take between four and five minutes [depending on the speed of your setup], and the DX11 tricks are heavily deployed and hell for older GPUs. At the end, you're presented with a results screen that only has the two figures – the average frames per second and a score – but is rich on system and OS details. It also allows you to save your results as an HTML file to anywhere on your machine, which is very nice indeed.

The QX9770/4870 combo pulled a fairly weak average of just 25.9fps, equating to a Unigine score of 653 overall, while our cutting-edge monster managed a more respectable 33.4fps and 842. It must also be noted that the HD 5850 renders much more DX11 detail. Paths that look cobbled on the 4870 looks downright rocky and roughly uneven on the newer card, for instance. Whether *Unigine Heaven* catches on or not and becomes part of a de facto benchmark run remains to be seen. But for now, it is a nice, interesting, up-to-date free utility for gauging how your machine will run the games coming out this holiday season and moving forward into 2010 [DX11 will become more and more important as we move into the new year].

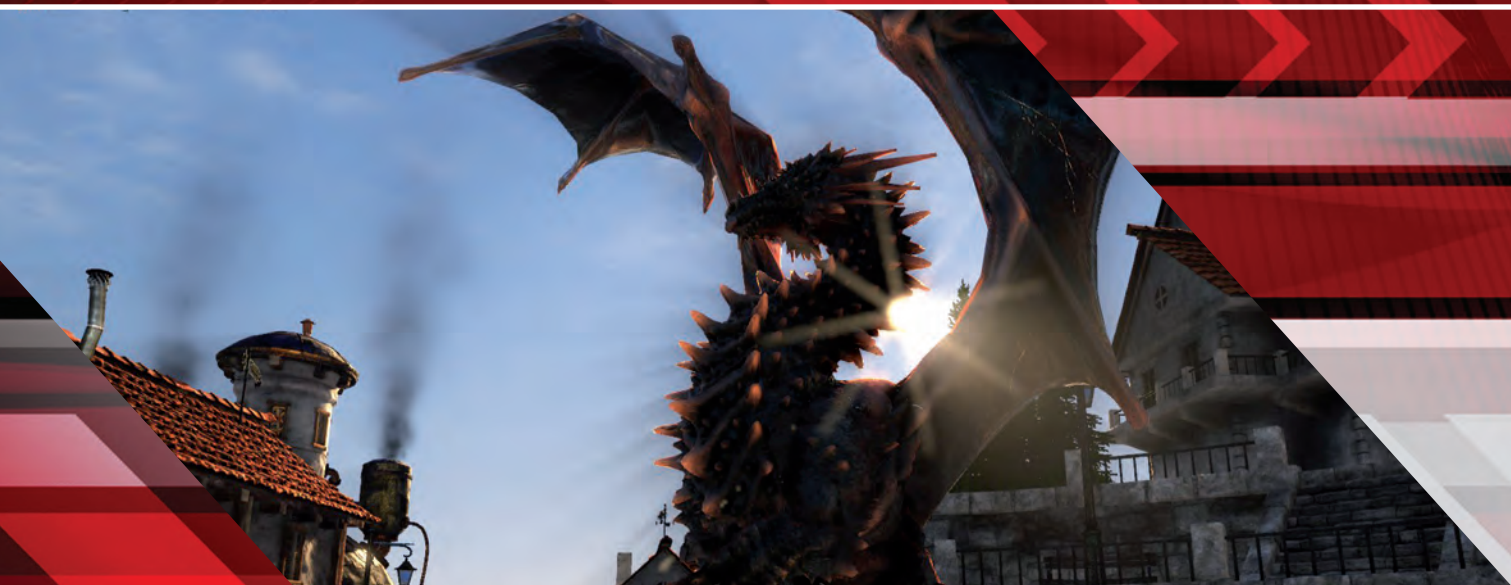
TIME!

Right we're calling it time with these five. Together they represent an excellent cross-section of games and free synthetics available today, and each produces relevant results that could guide you on your next carefully selected hardware upgrade. Honestly, I could go on with more like these for another 2,000 words, but then our highly efficient NAG sub would just slash it back down to the current amount anyway, for fear of our publisher falling prey to the bankruptcy that lurks our times like a man-eating shark off the coast of Amity.

I must, however, add one thing. Futuremark do have free versions of their 3DMark suite available for public usage, but they have gotten increasingly ridiculous about how the no-cost versions can be used. 3DMark06, for instance, requires that you have an Internet connection. All fair and good, but not a ubiquitous commodity in our market. So those who aren't connected simply aren't included – they can run the test, but can't see their own results! 3DMark Vantage is even more ridiculously draconian. After going through the schlep of e-mailing the company, begging for a free licence key, you get to run the suite once, and only once for no charge. Gee, that's well worth the substantial download, isn't it?

So, for non-professional, no-cost benchmarking, we haven't included either of these. Fortunately, Unigine has come to our aid with a very nice, very new environment with great benchmarking facilities entirely free of charge. For this alone they'll get my support. And then, lucky for you, there are all those great demos available on your NAG DVDs for the rest. And these will reflect your machine's actual performance in real, modern gaming titles. As they are real, modern gaming titles, after all.

Go run some tests, get some scores, and get your friends to run the same tests at the same settings – it's the PC equivalent of hauling out that measuring tape... We've shown you ours, after all. **NAG**



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Samsung SyncMaster XL2370

SAMSUNG IS THE BIGGEST LCD substrate manufacturer in the world and the company also happens to make some of the best displays in the world. From the very high-end to the entry-level units, Samsung has a product for everyone.

With almost everything being labelled HD in some form or another these days, there really isn't any point in investing in an LCD that doesn't do full HD. That is, those older 22-inch models that were limited to 1,680 x 1,050 are not really worth the bother, as the price of 23-inch 1080-capable LCDs has come down drastically.

The XL2370 is among the best 23-inch monitors you will find on the market. In fact, there are few monitors that look as bright, sharp or offer the contrast levels and colour richness the XL2370 offers. This is all courtesy of the LED technology that the monitor employs. Instead of fluorescent lights used in regular LCD displays, the XL2370 uses LED technology, which allows for more focused and brighter pixel illumination.

The quality is hard to put into words and has to be seen to be appreciated. The display is vibrant and is shimmer free. The grey-to-grey response time is rated at 2ms, but that is not the most impressive aspect of the monitor. That honour belongs to the rich colour and deep tones the monitor provides. We have yet to use a monitor that matches

the quality of the XL2370.

The XL2370 is a standard 16:9 monitor, which means that 1,920 x 1,200 is not possible – this may be an issue for those who need the additional 120 pixels on the vertical axis. 1,920 x 1,080 does mean that movies will not have black bars above and below as they do on 16:10 units.

The XL2370 supports digital connections only, but lacks DisplayPort and VGA D-sub inputs. However, the lack of HDCP support makes this an incomplete LCD in some ways. The missing inputs can be forgiven, but the content protection may pose problems in future for encoded movies.

These are the only downsides to the monitor, as it does everything else particularly well. The LCD is incredibly thin, measuring just over one centimetre. As a result, it makes it an incredibly lightweight monitor. It makes use of an external power brick, which is necessary to keep the profile of the monitor so small. While this means that there's another device that needs plugging in, we would gladly suffer this inconvenience if it means the monitor remains this light.

Another impressive feature of the monitor is the control panel, which remains invisible when the monitor is not powered, but is illuminated as soon as the monitor is switched on. The panel is touch sensitive, so you

don't end up pressing hard against the monitor.

The XL2370 has an analogue and digital audio output, which is particularly useful for consoles, where it may prove particularly difficult outputting audio via the analogue output, but video via DVI or HDMI.

The XL2370 is truly an impressive monitor, and despite some shortcomings, remains one of the best on the market. The picture quality goes a long way into offsetting any issues, as the image is nothing short of incredible. It's easy on the eyes and even after working on the LCD for brief periods, it's difficult to move back to a traditional LCD – it looks dull and uninspiring.

The XL2370 isn't cheap and costs more than some 26-inch units, but you'd be hard-pressed to find anything that looks better.

NAG

– Neo Sibeko



Bottom Line

The XL2370 is the best 23-inch monitor money can buy

Plus

- ★ Incredible picture quality
- ★ Light
- ★ Elegant design

Minus

- No DisplayPort input
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- Price

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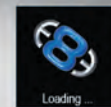
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In Folder Preview Feature

Thermaltake Level 10 Gaming Tower

THE THERMALTAKE LEVEL 10 Gaming Tower is easily the most talked-about chassis in existence today. Designed in partnership with BMW DesignWorksUSA, it's like no other chassis you have ever seen. In fact, to liken it to anything, it would have to be a completely custom-built rig, something that takes time, effort, and no small amount of ability to get right.

But if you have more disposable cash than time or, perhaps, talent, the Level 10 is intriguing. It's separated into four distinct compartments. In essence, the whole machine runs naked with the compartments hanging off a thick, strong, aluminium centre frame. The three that house your motherboard and main system components, PSU, and optical drives, are hinged to provide easier access. And the fourth, for 3.5-inch or 2.5-inch HDDs, is a series of individual little enclosures, which slide smoothly in and out as needed.

There's no denying that it looks good. Or, these things being subjective, unique at least - the goodness or not being entirely up to your personal taste. There is a lovely red LED strip that runs around the entire central spinal column, which creates a nice room effect, and individual LEDs on the drive bays, which are actually functional, reporting at a glance which bays are occupied and which are still available.

But when you get your hands into it to build your rig, there are elements that quickly begin to jar. It starts with the weight - well over 20kg of metal, which, despite the strong carry handle, makes getting the best angle of attack a bugger. It's also not a tool-less construction, unusual in the modern gaming hardware environment. The main compartment is big enough for a 5850, but might struggle with the extra length of a 5870. Unfortunately, we had none on hand to confirm this. The PSU area, at least, is easily large enough for a kilowatt unit.

It is brilliant that the drive bays can take 3.5-inch and 2.5-inch drives without any retooling, but less impressive that only the top two bays are hot swappable. And despite that massive weight and thickness of metal, the spine seems slightly off centre; so closing the compartments up again is a test of patience and firmness.

The Level 10 is a tall chassis, but manages to just barely fit under a

standard desk, although my regular table with its draws slung beneath just wouldn't have it.

But overall, I just find myself unable to follow in the footsteps of our international hardware-testing peers and endorse this monster with two thumbs up, so to speak. It just doesn't manage to bring anything really useful to the chassis party. The cooling is adequate but in no way spectacular. The chassis is well built but compromised by design. And the appearance, well, loses its shine quite rapidly, leaving you with a large, heavy lump of aluminium, which you can't really take out LANning to impress the competition with (unless you have the back of Arnold Schwarzenegger), and costs you more than a high-end GPU or several terabytes of storage.

If it were me, I'd spend the cash on something more intrinsically useful. And if you want a custom gaming rig, well, the only way to get it perfect is to build it yourself after all. **NAG**

- Russell Bennett



Specifications

Material: Aluminium Extrusion
Cooling: 1 x 140mm front intake fan; 1 x 120mm rear exhaust fan; 2 x 60mm HDD cooling fans
Drive Bays: 3 x 5.25-inch bays; 6 x 3.5-inch/2.5-inch bays (2 x hot-swappable)
Expansion Slots: 8
Motherboard Support: ATX; microATX
I/O Ports: 4 x USB 2.0; 1 x eSATA; 1 x HD audio
Weight: 21.37kg
Dimensions (D x W x H): 614mm x 318mm x 666.3mm



Bottom Line

Quirky and physically attractive, yes; particularly smart or revolutionary, no.

Plus

- ★ The look
- ★ Red LED mood-strip
- ★ Supports 2.5-, 3.5-inch drives

Minus

- Heavy
- Very expensive
- Not as solid as you'd expect

Mede8er

MEDIA PLAYERS FOR THE home have been with us for many years. With each passing year and generation, new features are added, mostly in the form of supported audio and video modes. As versatile as our current-generation consoles are, their media-playing abilities are still poor, as they have limited media-format support. Moving media onto and off these consoles can prove to be problematic, and as such, it is still necessary to have a dedicated media player.

As far as media players go, the Mede8er is the best unit we have tested so far. It's pricey, but few players on the market have the media-format support it has.

Aesthetically, it looks rather pleasing. But given what the Mede8er is capable of, looks should be the last thing concerning you. Video codec support includes DivX, XviD and DVD (VOB, IFO and ISO), and the Mede8er also supports the Matroska, MKV container, among many others. This is very important because many HD streams are in this format. The Mede8er is capable of outputting a full 1080p signal via component output or HDMI. Should you not have a unit capable of using any of these connection methods, you could use the composite output, but you will not be able to output any HD signal over this connection.

We would have liked an analogue D-sub output on the unit, as an HD signal can still be "passed" using this connection method. But strangely enough, it's absent even though this is a very cheap connection to implement. With that said, the Mede8er includes an HDMI cable and a component cable in the box, as well as other cables that one might need when using the unit.

Besides the impressive video quality, the scaling capabilities of the unit are particularly impressive. Watching 1080p content on a standard-definition TV via component output produces some great results. The player fixes the aspect ratio accordingly, and you have the option of cropping the video so that it fits the entire screen. Playing a video at the native resolution on a supporting display via the HDMI output provides a very impressive image as well. As far as video quality is concerned, it's hard to fault the Mede8er, as it really is among the best on the



Specifications

Disk Capacity: 2TB (max.)
Disk Interface: SATA
Video Format Support: MKV, H.264, DVD (VOB - IFO - ISO), DivX, XviD, DAT, AVI, MPEG, HD MPEG-2, TS, HD MPEG-4, SP, ASP, AVCD (H.264), MTS, M2ts, WMV9, FLV, VC-1, Real Networks (RM/RMVB) 8/9/10, up to 720p
Audio Format Support: MP3, MP2, OGG Vorbis, PCM, LPCM, AAC, RA, Dolby AC3 Passthrough, Dolby AC3 Downmix, DTS Passthrough, DTS Downmix, FLAC, WAV, WMA

market.

Navigating the menu is easy enough and anybody will be able to figure out how to access the library, be it on an SD card or USB flash drive or some other network storage device. However, there is no browsing window that displays "screen shots" of the media available on the player. That means you are confined to actually browsing folders and file names, instead of getting a quick overview of what is on the player. This is a user interface shortcoming, rather than a hardware fault, but one that will no doubt be addressed in an upcoming firmware update. Where the hardware is concerned, it's well put together and the proprietary media processor used works wonders on both standard- and high-definition video.

Installing the hard drive is an easy and painless process, and will take less than five minutes to do. The unit features a fan that is supposed to keep the hard drive cool over extended periods of use. Having said that, the unit does generate some heat that you can feel when touching the casing, however this shouldn't present a reliability problem. The Mede8er is a near perfect player and certainly the most fully-featured one we have ever had the pleasure of using. Despite the price, it's certainly worth investing in. **NAG**

- Neo Sibeko

Bottom Line The best media player available locally.	
Plus + Great video quality + Good downscaling + Easy to use	Minus - Interface could be better - No VGA output

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ROCCAT Apuri

EVERYONE HAS THAT ONE friend who brings along some weird piece of kit to a LAN party. The guy with the RAM drive, or the HD DVD writer that he still uses, or the backbreaking 21-inch CRT that gives him "superior colour reproduction" – you know the type. Now you can be that guy, with the ROCCAT Apuri "mouse bungee." You see, like your strange friend, you know that the Apuri is, in fact, quite a handy device, and you don't mind the sideways glances of your LAN buddies.

Despite its exotic looks, the Apuri's main function is rather simple: to keep your mouse's cable from getting in your way while you're pwning n00bs. It's the first of ROCCAT's Smart Desktop Management System (SDMS) line, and also includes a four-port active USB hub. "Active" is an important distinction to make, because it means that the hub is powered. It's able to power four devices without any signs of struggle. It can even charge devices such as cellphones while the PC is off, since it uses its own AC adapter. Thankfully, it's not necessary to use the external

Specifications

USB 2.0 ports: 4
Active (AC) power output: 2A
Passive (USB) power output: 500mA
USB cable length: 1.5m
Other: Detachable mouse bungee

power adapter, although the hub's power output is limited without it.

The Apuri serves its mouse bungee function admirably, and definitely keeps the mouse's cable out of the way. ROCCAT claims that it'll make any wired mouse feel like a wireless mouse, and that's pretty much the gist of it. The only real drawback the Apuri has is that the tripod feet aren't sticky. They're rubberised, and textured, so the Apuri doesn't slide about during normal use, but it has to be held in place when you're plugging in or ejecting any USB devices. It's hardly a design-shattering oversight, but might be something for ROCCAT to take into consideration for future iterations. **NAG**

– Geoff Burrows



Bottom Line

It does just what it "says," but won't exactly be on everyone's top ten, must-have gaming accessory lists.

Plus

+ Works as you'd expect

Minus

- A bit pricey
 - Niche market

ROCCAT Kone

IF YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF a seasoned PC gamer, you're no doubt aware that a decent mouse is an important part of any gaming rig. Logitech has been leading the pack for some time now, with Microsoft and Razer following closely behind. But they're not the only manufacturers worth paying attention to. ROCCAT hasn't been around for too long, but their mission statement "Do it your own way, and don't talk sh*t" means they're out to prove some sort of point. We're not sure exactly what that point is, but we're pretty sure it's something like "build quality, customisability and bright, flashy colours galore."

The Kone has a solid feel to it. Its smooth lines are reminiscent of the Logitech G5, but with a few angles thrown in to squeeze it into the slightly uncomfortable side of things. Despite having the look of a palm-style mouse, it's better suited to holding in the claw grip. The Kone is also a bit of a letdown in terms of performance.

While it works perfectly well in-game, the mouse is "flighty" on the desktop, and is uncooperative when it comes to smaller, precision movements. This effect was heavily accentuated with the default settings, but turning the polling rate down to

Specifications

Tracking: Up to 3,200dpi (laser)
Polling rate: Up to 1,000Hz
Storage: 128KB for on-board profile storage
Customisation: 8 buttons, macro programming
Weight adjustment: 5-20g

125Hz (from the default of 1,000Hz) alleviated the bulk of the problem. Even with that done, cursor response was still far from perfect: you'll have to spend a bit of time adjusting the sensitivity and acceleration before it's acceptable.

The best-performing part of the Kone isn't the mouse itself, but rather the software. The device's configuration options are vast – enough to rival the Logitech G9 – and feature five customisable profiles. The profiles are stored in the mouse itself, along with macros up to a certain length. And, if you find your peripherals severely lacking in disco power, the five lights on the mouse can be individually configured, and even set to blink madly – if that's your thing. **NAG**

– Geoff Burrows



Bottom Line

While it works quite well in game, the Kone's performance is a bit lacking elsewhere.

Plus

+ Highly customisable
 + Good in-game performance

Minus

- Poor desktop performance
 - Default settings need tweaking

Specifications

- On-board memory
- 1,000Hz ultrapolling
- Up to 5,600dpi 3.5G laser sensor
- Up to 200 inches per second/50g acceleration
- Battery Life: Approximately 14 hours
- Seven programmable buttons

Razer Mamba

CANNOT STRESS THIS ENOUGH: the Mamba's packaging is easily the coolest I've ever seen a mouse stored in. It's kind of like a portable display stand, with the mouse (which rests on a pedestal) safely encased inside a Perspex box, while the plastic stand below houses all the fiddly bits like cables, a charging dock and user manuals. It's so stylish that I was tempted to give the mouse a score of 5 out of 5 before I even removed it from its box. That would be a bit unethical, so I grudgingly removed the mouse from its true home to mess around with it. I'm glad that I did, because it turns out that the Mamba is a fantastic gaming mouse.

First off, the Mamba can be used either wired or wirelessly. That gap between the two main buttons may look slightly ridiculous, but it's actually a great design choice. You can plug the supplied cable directly into a port tucked away within the gap if you feel like going wired and this will charge the mouse's battery for wireless use at the same time. As I mentioned before, you'll also find a

wireless receiver/charging dock in the mouse's amazing packaging.

The mouse works very well, whether it's being used for gaming or general computer use. You won't find any drivers in the packaging – you'll have to download them yourself from www.razersupport.com. These drivers will let you change button assignments, alter sensitivity settings (maxed out at 5,600dpi), and generally tweak almost every aspect of the mouse to suit your play style. It's a highly responsive and extremely comfortable mouse, so chances are you're not going to be blaming any lost frags on the Mamba.

Aside from its high price, the Mamba cannot really be faulted. Besides, I'd pay the cash just to own that packaging. It can't best the Logitech G5 or the G9 in my opinion, but for anyone who is a devout Razer follower or is in the market for a truly fantastic high-end gaming mouse, the Mamba is definitely worth a look. **NAG**

– Dane Remendes



Bottom Line

Razer's Mamba is a brilliant gaming mouse. It also comes in the greatest packaging ever, which automatically makes it more awesome.

Plus

- + Responsive and precise
- + Comfortable to use
- + OMG, the packaging!

Minus

- Expensive

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ASUS Maximus III Formula

THE ASUS ROG LINE of motherboards has come a long way since its inception some years ago. From rather gimmicky motherboards that offered very little over the regular counterparts to motherboards that are revered by many and often present the best of the respective chipsets used.

The Maximus III Formula is one of the first P55 motherboards to be released, but to this day very few boards have more features. Built to the same levels of quality as the previous-generation Extreme boards, the Maximus III Formula has such a vast list of features that no board on the market, save for the Maximus III Extreme [yet to be officially released at the time of writing], can match it.

It has eight SATA ports, four of which are controlled by a pair of third-party JMicron drive controllers, ROG OC Station support and ROG Connect, which allows one to monitor the system and change settings on the fly on a second computer via a USB cable. The RAM slots feature a latch-less mechanism, which makes it easy to remove or add memory modules without uninstalling the graphics card.

Specifications

Chipset: Intel P55
Memory Banks: 4 x DDR3 184-pin
CPU Support: Intel Core i3, i5, i7
Expansion Slots: 3 x PCI-E 16x, 2 x PCI-E 1x, 2 x PCI 2.2

The board features the now familiar MemOK! function, has labelled voltage read points, 16-phase power, CrossFire and SLI support, SupremeFX X-Fi audio with EAX Advanced HD 4.0 and a host of other high-end features.

The overclocking capability is particularly good; the board will likely be limited by the CPU in terms of overclocking headroom more than anything else. While you may not be able to set BCLK records as easily as you can with a competing motherboard, it is possible to set really high speeds. An overclocker achieved a BCLK of more than 270MHz with this motherboard using an ES 870 CPU.

ASUS has produced another motherboard worthy of joining the ROG line of products. And best of all, it's a great-looking board. There

isn't much to fault this motherboard on, and as it stands, it's the best P55 board you can buy. It might change with the Extreme board, but until then, the Maximus III Formula deserves a perfect score. **NAG**

– Neo Sibeko



Bottom Line

One of the best P55 motherboards on the market

Plus

- + Looks great
- + Packed with features
- + Great build quality

Minus

- None

GIGABYTE GA-P55A-UD6 (rev. 1.0)

NO, YOU ARE NOT seeing double. We did review the GIGABYTE GA-P55-UD6 board last month. But this is the A version, and the difference between the two is a little more than just cosmetic.

Some might not be aware of it, but under very extreme conditions, the LGA socket on the previous board would burn. This has been fixed and the GA-P55A-UD6 features a completely new socket that is nickel-plated. Besides rectifying this issue (note: the burn issue has only been recorded on less than a handful of motherboards), the A version adds USB 3.0 and SATA 6Gb/sec support.

Otherwise, the motherboard is much like the previous GA-P55-UD6 motherboard. It features the same audio controller, 24-phase power, incredible overclocking features and takes 1156 CPUs to new heights with very high BCLK scaling. Testing on this board proved a little better than on the previous UD6 board, though, with an air-cooling maximum BCLK of 233MHz instead of 227MHz. This slight boost in BCLK scaling could be the result of a newer BIOS or the 870 CPU improving in BCLK scaling over time. Either way, it

Specifications

Chipset: Intel P55
Memory Banks: 6 x DDR3 184-pin
CPU Support: Intel Core i3, i5, i7
Expansion Slots: 3 x PCI-E 16x (16x + 8x + 8x), 2 x PCI-E 1x, 2 x PCI 2.2

is too early for us to say that the P55A-UD6 is the cause of this slight boost in frequency.

These are about the only changes to the motherboard, as everything else remains the same as it was on the previous board. If you are looking for 3-Way SLI support, it's not present on this board, but will be available on the UD7, which we will review in our next issue.

If you are going to buy the GA-P55-UD6, you may as well buy the A version. They cost roughly the same and you also get a board with a better LGA socket. GIGABYTE hasn't done much here other than make an already impressive board even better. It's still the best-clocking P55 motherboard on the market. **NAG**

– Neo Sibeko



Bottom Line

Still the best P55 based motherboard on the market

Plus

- + USB 3.0 and SATA 6Gb/sec
- + Great overclocker
- + New LGA socket

Minus

- None

ASUS SABERTOOTH 55i

THE MARKET ISN'T SHORT of P55 motherboards by now. At this point, there are more P55 boards than there are X58 boards. The strange thing is that the P55 was released months after the X58, yet there are more SKUs than any other board.

One of the manufacturers that have contributed largely to the line-up of P55 boards is ASUS, and they have a new board that is not part of their "regular" ROG or P7 range. This is the SABERTOOTH 55i board and it is not clear at first glance where this board fits in.

It has fewer features than the ROG boards, but costs more than the regular P7 series. This puts it in a very precarious position, as there are no directly competing motherboards from other manufacturers. What this board is made for is the overclocker who wants the bare essentials but with the quality components of the ROG line.

In fact, it is for those who are only interested in the overclocking features of a motherboard, as the 55i is a more robust board than the Maximus III Formula, for example. Not only does it use more robust heat sinks ("CeraMIX" as ASUS calls it), but it also has mounting holes for a fan that can be used to blow air onto the RAM.

More importantly, the board uses

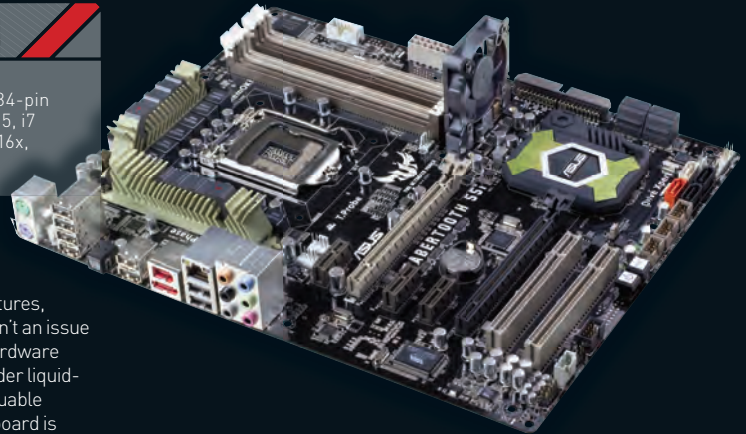
Specifications

Chipset: Intel P55
Memory Banks: 4 x DDR3 184-pin
CPU Support: Intel Core i3, i5, i7
Expansion Slots: 2 x PCI-E 16x,
 3 x PCI-E 1x, 2 x PCI 2.2

higher-quality capacitors and MOSFETs than ASUS's other boards, which means that it can tolerate more extreme temperatures, and switch faster as well. This isn't an issue for most, but for those whose hardware spends vast amounts of time under liquid-nitrogen cooling, these are invaluable additions. Because this motherboard is aimed at extreme users, we expected it to have on-board voltage read points, dual BIOS, ROG OC Station support and a host of other features that are on the Maximus III Formula. But this is not the case.

What you pay for here is the component quality of the motherboard and nothing else. As such, it is ideal for serious overclockers; not the regular gamer. With that said, it's a great motherboard and should "sit" well in any enthusiast's computer. **NAG**

— Neo Sibeko



Bottom Line

A pure overclocker's motherboard and not much else

Plus

- + Quality of components
- + Tough
- + Good overclocker

Minus

- Lacks features

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Freecom MediaPlayer XS HDMI

WHO CARRIES DVDS AROUND anymore these days? Blu-ray Discs are only now starting to take off, but movies and TV shows in digital formats are the way forward for most of us, aren't they? Not to mention music and photos. You may buy an album on CD, initially, but it quickly gets turned into MP3s. These days, some TVs have built-in USB host ports, but these are generally the high-end units that few of us can afford. Well, here we have a small box that can read media files on a USB drive and play them on a TV.

This device is very compact, indeed: taking it around to a friend's place or just keeping it in a small box is no problem at all. When in use, it is not quite "mobile," as it requires a power outlet. It connects to almost any USB drive on one end, and a TV's composite AV inputs or an HDMI input at the other. It ships with a remote control. While this device is highly portable, there is nothing to prevent one from leaving it set up in a fairly permanent fashion.

Unfortunately, this unit is not without its shortcomings. While its

Specifications

Dimensions: 91mm x 67mm x 21mm
Interface: USB 2.0
Output: HDMI, RCA
Supported Formats:
Video: MPEG-1, MPEG-2, MPEG-4, DivX, XviD
Audio: MP3, WMA, WAV

physical design is pretty slick, its software interface needs work. First off, it is impossible to scroll off one end of a file list and wrap around to the other. This means that if you want to watch *Zodiac*, for example, you have to scroll all the way to the end of your file list. This in itself would not be too bad if you could navigate folders (and keep your stuff organised into various folders, thus keeping your lists shorter). However, this player does not do that. Instead, it reads your drive and combines all your folders' contents into lists of music, video, and photo files, thus rendering any directory structure that you created for neatness' sake null and void. **NAG**

– Alex Jelagin



Bottom Line

Although the physical design is pretty neat, the software side makes this device best used with small-capacity USB drives.

Plus

- + Very compact
- + Simple to use

Minus

- Flawed software interface
- Some playback problems

Freecom USB Memory 120GB

WONDER HOW MUCH LONGER single- and double-digit gigabyte-capacity flash drives are going to be around for. It is a fact that the average size of data files is growing, and increasingly we use portable storage solutions to transport media files. Given that HD video is on the rise, we will start seeing some really large video files floating around. Regular USB flash drives will no longer suffice – certainly not for multiple files.

If you are looking for "megs per rand," then a hard drive-based external drive may be the thing for you. Furthermore, hard drive-based solutions typically deliver higher data transfer speeds. But if you are looking for space economy, and have some cash to burn, then this offering from Freecom may just be what you want. It is, in my opinion, the ideal (physical) size for a portable data storage device: small enough to fit comfortably in pretty much any pocket, and light enough to forget it's even there. However, it is not so small that one is likely to lose it. Because this device is flash-based, there are

Specifications

Capacity: 120GB
Dimensions: 82mm x 58mm x 9mm
Weight: 80g
Interface: USB 2.0

no moving parts, and therefore there is less chance of something breaking. It is also, therefore, less sensitive to movement or shock, and will not get as warm. Although it is flash-based, it delivers transfer speeds somewhat better than most flash drives.

From an aesthetic point of view, this drive is very slick indeed. It has a silvery finish (yes, some of us would have preferred black) in a satiny-feeling rubber material that helps protect it from knocks. A blue power indicator lights up under this layer, looking all diffused-like – very cool!

NAG

– Alex Jelagin



Bottom Line

Basically, I need to wangle a way to hang onto this unit. It's a very cool way to carry data around!

Plus

- + Compact and light
- + Pleasing aesthetics

Minus

- A touch pricey

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BY TARRYN VAN DER BYL

I made this!

WHAT THE GAME COMPANIES don't want you to know, of course, is that making games is so totally super easy that anybody can do it. Well, anybody using this amazing FPS GeneratorTron 6000 [patent pending], anyway. Really qualified scientists and other smart people have been hard at work in secret underground bunker laboratories, identifying and diagnosing core FPS tropes and compiling this handy paradigm of everything anyone could possibly want to put into an FPS. Remember, if it's been done a million times before already, it's because it's awesome.

In a/an

- ☐ bleak dystopian ☐ post-apocalyptic
☐ neo-noir cyberpunk ☐ corporate-controlled
☐ ironically anachronistic ☐ war-torn
☐ predictable ☐ distant ☐ near

future, a/an

- ☐ deep space mining operation
- ☐ interplanetary colonisation mission
- ☐ private terraforming enterprise on Mars
- ☐ remote Pacific island

is locked down and quarantined following

- ☐ the excavation of some inscrutable and possibly (probably) alien artefact.
- ☐ an outbreak of some highly contagious and possibly (probably) alien virus.
- ☐ the excavation of a possibly (probably) alien artefact, and the subsequent outbreak of a possibly (probably) alien virus.
- ☐ ZOMBIES!

You, a/an

- ☐ intriguingly scarred mercenary with a questionable past,
- ☐ previously imprisoned operative, released on conditional parole,
- ☐ biogenetically enhanced super soldier,
- ☐ so-called rookie with a frankly startling degree of

competence in every weapon ever, including stuff you've never actually even seen before, and a somewhat implausible amount of confidence invested in you by your superiors despite your alleged inexperience,

are deployed to

- ☐ locate and capture some sort of device whose function or purpose is never actually really explained,

with the sporadic assistance of

- ☐ a hot chick.
- ☐ a chick over your helmet voice-communication system who sounds hot.
- ☐ a really bitchy chick who becomes more attractive the more she becomes irresistibly attracted to you despite the fact that you're a professional killer and despite the fact that about the most romantic thing that happens during the entire game is you killing something a bit bigger than all the other stuff you've killed.

After

- ☐ single-handedly dismantling an entire enemy operation that obviously cost a lot of cash, and blowing up something really huge,
- ☐ shooting a lot of stuff on vague pretexts,
- ☐ a cheap boss fight,

and revealing

- ☐ an insidious corporate scheme that doesn't actually really make sense,
- ☐ an unlikely plan involving pharmaceuticals that would probably never have worked,
- ☐ a traitor in the ranks who was always obvious because he speaks with an English accent,
- ☐ something that's clearly supposed to be really significant but doesn't much matter because you weren't actually paying any attention and it's all so badly written anyway.

the game ends

- ☐ abruptly. ☐ "unsatisfyingly." ☐ inexplicably.



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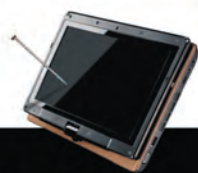
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